

"Of His own will begat He us with the word of Truth"

-- James 1:18 --

The Word Of Truth

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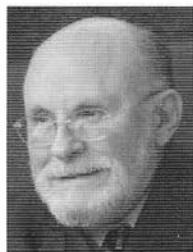
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SET FOR THE DEFENSE OF THE GOSPEL



EDITORIAL

A Commentary on the Religious Trends and Conditions of the Times

HE BELIEVED GOD
and
IT WAS COUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

"And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness." (Gen 15:6)

Faith, real faith, and real believing reckons with God in mind, not the immediate environment or abilities. This is how faith reasons – and there are no exceptions.

Without any apparent delay, faith leaps forward, leaving doubt behind, and takes hold of the promise of God. That is what faith does!

Abram was a man who had little exposure to God. He was not raised up as a believer. Our text is the first time of record that he has said anything responsive to God. Twice he "called upon the name of the Lord" (Gen 12:8; 13:4). Counting this occasion, God has spoken to him four times, and this is the first time Abram has responded. Now God has declared plainly that Abram himself,

although he is naturally incapable of doing so, will beget an heir. Without any apparent delay, faith leaps forward, leaving doubt behind, and takes hold of the promise of God. That is what faith does! This is not super-faith, but faith itself. It is "the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen" (Heb 11:1). Faith is not an ambiguous wish, but a strong and positive assurance. There is a sense in which faith does not cause the promise to happen. It is, rather, the comforting assurance that it will happen.

All of this must be considered in view of the times and the comparative sparsity of revelation that had been given. If faith could react in this manner during those times, what ought we to expect faith to

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do now that the "Sun of Righteousness" has risen to the height of His glory, grace has been lavished upon the saints, and the Holy Spirit has been poured out abundantly upon them? At once you should see the error of trying to drag Abram down to the level of contemporary doubters.

According to the Interlinear (literal translation), the text reads, "and he believed in Yahweh." INTERLINEAR

HE BELIEVED IN THE LORD

"And he believed in the LORD . . ." Other versions read, "believed in Jehovah," ASV "believed the Lord," NIV "had faith in the Lord," BBE "believed God," DOUAY "put his faith in the Lord," NAB "put his trust in the Lord," TNK "And he believed! Believed GOD!" MESSAGE and "believed in (trusted in, relied on, remained steadfast to) the Lord." AMPLIFIED

Understand that the word "in" is in the Hebrew text and is an accurate translation—i.e. "Believed IN the Lord." That, in my understanding, is of greater weight than "believed the Lord." It signifies that Abram trusted in the Lord who made the promise, and therefore was able to heartily embrace the promise. This equates to believing that God "IS and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him" (Heb 11:6).

All that Abram could believe was what God had revealed of Himself, for in matters pertaining to God, revela-

tion is the circumference within which true knowledge is obtained.

Considering how comparatively little Abram knew about God, this is truly a marvelous thing. It teaches us that there is more of God in what He promises than most men have dared to believe. Of course, if a person minds the things of this world, he will not be able to see what Abram saw, even though better and greater promises have been given to us through Christ Jesus.

This is faith matured. Abram believed God when he left Ur of the Chaldees. As it is written, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Heb 11:8).

Abram's faith did not increase by beholding some great work – like obtaining part of the land. Faith was, rather, made stronger by Divine affirmation. This was a most excellent confirmation that "faith cometh by hearing" (Rom 10:17).

There is a tendency in the natural man to require God to do something extraordinary before one will trust in Him. Thus men look for signs, and outward confirmations that God is dealing with them. Faith, however, does not come by beholding, but by hearing. It is not the result of a powerful Divine manifestation that violently throws unbelief to the ground, leav-

ing no other alternative but to believe. Like the ravens brought bread and flesh to Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1-6), so the Word of God brings faith to those with an ear to hear (Rom 10:14-17).

When our text says that Abram “believed in the Lord,” it is not referring to something Abram said – like, “now I believe . . .” This is a Divine affirmation of something that God saw in Abram. Technically, it is not a confession of faith, but a statement of what God saw in Abram.

THIS TEXT QUOTED BY PAUL AND JAMES

Both Paul and James quote this text in their writings.

1. PAUL: “For what saith the scrip-

When our text says that Abram “believed in the Lord,” it is not referring to something Abram said – like, “now I believe . . .”

ture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom 4:3). “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Gal 3:6).

2. JAMES: “And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (James 2:23).

PAUL

Paul’s use of the text is found in his teaching concerning the means by

which men are made righteous in the eyes of the Lord. To this day, this subject is hotly debated in the Christian community – whether a man is justified by believing, or by doing.

Paul affirms that justification precedes doing, pointing out that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also” (Rom 4:11). Had Abraham been made righteous after circumcision, he could not be the father of all who believe – only of the Jews.

JAMES

James uses the text to confirm that those who are justified, having faith, will show forth evidence of that justification. He maintains that a claim of identity with the Lord is not enough. It must be made known in the godly conduct of the individual. He says the statement was “fulfilled” when “he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar” (James 2:21). The word “fulfilled” carries the idea of verification, or confirmation. James makes the point that there is no such thing as a justified person who lives in contradiction of God. In our parlance, anyone claiming to be a Christian who lives after the ungodly manner of the world has lied. Paul teaches the same thing in his discourse about “a form of godliness” that denies the power thereof (2 Tim 3:1-5).

ACCORDING TO HIS FAITH

According to this text, as well as the exposition of Paul in the fourth chapter of Romans, Abram’s faith is

what moved God to count him to be righteous.

HE COUNTED IT TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS

“ . . . and He counted it to him for righteousness.” Other versions read, “accounted it to him for righteousness,” ^{NKJV} “reckoned it to him for righteousness,” ^{NASB} “credited it to him as righteousness,” ^{NIV} “it was put to his account as righteousness,” ^{BBE} “reputed to him unto justice,” ^{DOUAY} “regarded that faith to be his approval of Abram,” ^{GWN} “credited it to him as an act of righteousness,” ^{NAB} “considered his response of faith as proof of genuine loyalty,” ^{NET} “counted him as righteous because of his faith,” ^{NLT} “He reckoned it to his merit,” ^{TNK} “considered him righteous on account of his faith,” ^{LIVING} “imputed to him for righteousness,” ^{ABP} “the LORD was pleased with him,” ^{CEV} “accepted him as one who has done what is right,” ^{ERV} “was pleased with him and accepted him,” ^{GNB} “declared him Set-Right-with-God,” ^{MESSAGE} “counted it to him as righteousness (right standing with God).” ^{AMPLIFIED}

As you can see by the various versions, this is not a simplistic statement. Further, because it is something God Himself is said to have done, we cannot afford to be wrong in our conclusions. This is particularly true since this statement is the basis for extended apostolic doctrine – particularly concerning the matter of justification.

Much of our understanding of this text hinges on the meaning of the word “counted.” Alternative translations use the word “accounted,” ^{NKJV} “reckoned,” ^{NASB} “credited,” ^{NIV} “put to his account,” ^{BBE} “reputed,” ^{DOUAY} “regarded,” ^{GWN} “considered,” ^{NET} “imputed,” ^{ABP} “accepted,” ^{ERV}

“pleased with,” ^{GNB} and “set-right-with-God.” ^{MESSAGE}

If we approach this matter academically, no real satisfaction will be realized. Lexically, the word translated “counted” is as follows: *by;x' chashab {khaw-shab'}* Meaning: 1) to think, plan, esteem, calculate, invent, make a judgment, imagine, count 1a) (Qal) 1a1) to think, account 1a2) to plan, devise, mean 1a3) to charge, impute, reckon 1a4) to esteem, value, regard 1a5) to invent 1b) (Niphal) 1b1) to be accounted, be thought, be esteemed 1b2) to be computed, be reckoned 1b3) to be imputed 1c) (Piel) 1c1) to think upon, consider, be mindful of 1c2) to think to do, devise, plan 1c3) to count, reckon 1d) (Hithpael) to be considered. ^{STRONG'S/THAYER}

This is a record of how God regarded Abram believing in Him. Abram had left Ur of the Chaldees as God commanded – but that was not counted to him for righteousness. He had arrived in Canaan and built an altar to the Lord – but that was not accounted to him for righteousness. When the Lord appeared to him and said He was going to give this land to his seed, Abram moved to a higher place, built an altar, and called upon the name of the Lord – but the Lord did not count that to him for righteousness. After spending some time in Egypt during a famine in Canaan, Abram returned to Bethel, to the place of the altar, and again called upon the name of the Lord – but the Lord did not account that to him for righteousness. After hearing of the capture of Lot, Abram took 318 of his trained servants, pursued four kings and their armies, slaughtered them, and returned with all of the people who had been captured and their goods – but the Lord did not account that to

him for righteousness. After returning from the triumph, Abram was met by Melchizedek. After being blessed by him, Abram gave tithes of everything to Melchizedek – but the Lord did not account that to him for righteousness.

Now, after clarifying to Abram that his “seed” would not be reckoned as Eliezer, his lead steward, the Lord tells the patriarch that he himself, though past age, would beget the promised seed. His own begotten son would be the heir of the promise that was given to him.

From the human point of view, this was an absolute impossibility. So far as human aptitude is concerned, there is no way that this could happen. There was no way to rejuvenate

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a body that, so far as procreation is concerned, was “dead.” There was no historical precedent that would confirm this could be done. The best physicians would have rejected the idea that this was possible. There was no other prophet that could confirm this was the truth, establishing it by two or more witnesses. No promise like this had ever been given to anyone else.

Now, the fact of faith is set squarely before us. This is an example of how faith moves those who possess it to reason.

NOT LEFT TO GUESS

We are not left to guess about this matter. “(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before Him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness” (Rom 4:17-22). I hardly see how the matter could be more plainly stated.

THINGS ABRAHAM DID

1. Against hope believed in hope. Other versions read “contrary to hope,” NKJV “hoping against hope,” NRSV “without reason for hope,” BBE “when there was nothing left to hope for,” GWN “though there seemed to be no hope,” NJB “even though such a promise just couldn’t come to pass!,” LIVING “Under utterly hopeless circumstances,” WEYMOUTH “even when there was no reason for hoping,” GNB and “[For Abraham, human reason for] hope being gone.” AMPLIFIED. There simply was no mere human reasoning that could move Abram to rest in the truth of what God had said. But faith is not so restricted. Abram “believed in hope” –i.e., he believed and commenced to live in the expectation of the fulfillment of God’s promise.

2. Was strong in faith. Other versions read, "strengthened in faith," NKJV "waxed strong through faith," ASV "made strong by faith," BBE "became strong because of faith," GWN "empowered by faith," NAB "His faith and trust grew stronger," LIVING "became mighty in faith," WEYMOUTH "empowered in the belief," ABP "his faith filled him with power," GNB "He plunged into the promise and came up strong," MESSAGE and "grew strong and was empowered by faith." AMPLIFIED Abram's faith was not feeble, for a weak faith cannot sustain a person – it will not keep Peter walking on the water, so to speak. Abram's faith was not "weak," but strong. It was not "little," but great.

3. Giving glory to God. Other versions read, "gave glory to God," NIV "giving honor to God," GWN "brought glory to God," NLT "praised God for this blessing before it happened," LIVING "gave God glory," MONTGOMERY "gave all the credit to God," CEV "just praised God," ERV "ready for God," MESSAGE "gave praise and glory to God." AMPLIFIED God was glorified because Abram's faith drew attention to His commitment and testified of God's greatness, as well.

4. Was fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able to perform. Other versions read, "fully convinced," NKJV "fully assured," NASB "being certain," BBE "most fully knowing," DOUAY "absolutely confident," GWN "full certified," PNT "completely sure," LIVING "absolutely certain," WEYMOUTH "Full assurance," WILLIAMS and "Fully satisfied and assured." AMPLIFIED There was no doubt in Abram – no questioning of the promise itself. His only concern had been how the promise would be

fulfilled. However, now that God had plainly said he would beget the promised seed, Abram rested in the palace of faith.

THINGS ABRAHAM DID NOT DO

1. Was not weak in faith. Other versions read, "not being weak in faith," NKJV "without becoming weak in faith," NASB "without weakening in his faith," NIV "did not weaken in faith," NRSV "not being feeble in faith," BBE "his trust did not waver," CJE "without weakening in the faith," CSB "was not sickly in his faith," MRD "did not shake his faith," NJB "fainted not in the faith," PNT "faith didn't weaken," IE and "never weakened in faith." WILLIAMS

2. Considered not his own body, now dead so far as procreation was concerned. Other versions read, "he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead," NIV "did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body," NRSV "though his body seemed to him little better than dead," BBE "neither did he consider," DOUAY "Through faith he regarded the facts," GWN "was not sickly in his faith, while contemplating his inert body," MRD "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead," NIB and "not having been weak in the faith, he did not consider his own body." YLT

Two differing views are reflected in these versions. First, that Abraham did not consider his own frailty because he was not weak in the faith. Second, that he maintained his faith even though he did consider his own frailty. I am persuaded the first is the proper view. Because Abraham's faith was strong, he did not review his natural capability.

3. Did not consider the deadness of Sarah's womb. "Sarah's womb was already dead," NIV "the barrenness of Sarah's womb," NRSV and "was past childbearing." TNT As Abram reasoned on the promise of God, he did not throw the fact of Sarai's barrenness into the equation.

4. Did not stagger at the promise of God through unbelief. Other versions read, "did not waver," NKJV "No distrust made him waver," RSV "did not give up faith," BBE "hesitated not," DARBY "He didn't doubt God's promise," GWN "he did not doubt or disbelieve," NJB "never doubted," LIVING and "no unbelief or distrust made him waver (doubtingly question)." AMPLIFIED Although the promise of God was great – far superior to any promise vouchsafed to men at this point in time – it did not cause Abram to stagger through unbelief.

Two things are made quite clear in this inspired assessment of Abraham. First, his faith was absolutely consistent. Second, unbelief or doubt did not interrupt his faith. I do not know how any other conclusion can be reached concerning this assessment.

A DIVINE MANNER

There is a certain Divine manner that is made known here. Faith is assessed after it has been tried – not before. This has proved confusing to many, who are intent upon assessing the faith of people of Scriptural record prematurely. Thus, some view Abram's faith as wavering when he considered his own childlessness, or of the possibility of Eliezer being the "seed," or when Sarah gave him her handmaid as a means to obtaining the promised seed. It makes perfect sense to the flesh to reason in such a manner. And, I suppose, were it not for a

revelation on the subject, this might appear to be proper. However, there is revelation on the matter, and such reasoning is not proper.

FAITH IS ALWAYS TESTED

Faith is always tested, and that testing is to be considered vital. Peter wrote, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:6-7)." That is the ultimate view of faith, but it also applies to certain times of testing.

Jesus once told Peter that Satan had desired to have him, to sift him as wheat. Satan's intent was to destroy Peter's faith. However, Jesus said, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:32). That very night the sifting of the devil took place, God having given him permission to do his dreadful work. During that time of great testing, Peter denied Jesus three times. However, before that night of trial was over, after his third denial, "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:62).

Peter's faith did not fail, even though he was, so to speak, knocked down. As Paul would say it, "struck down, but not destroyed" NKJV (2 Cor 4:9). The Living Bible reads, "knocked down, but never knocked out." That incident, as bitter as it

was, was never held against Peter. I do not doubt that he oft remembered it with great sorrow, but God did not! It was a time of testing, and Peter ended up with the faith, not without it.

Let all men cease and desist from finding fault with men while they were being tested. Wait until the test is over. Paul did, and moved by the Holy Spirit he testified to the strength of Abraham's faith, not its weakness. The reason? He assessed the faith of the patriarch at the proper time: AFTER it had been tested and proved to be genuine. It is good for us to strive to reason in such a manner.

A BOLD TEXT

Now our text states the case as boldly as it can be stated: "And he

Let all men cease and desist from finding fault with men while they were being tested. Wait until the test is over. Paul did, and moved by the Holy Spirit he testified to the strength of Abraham's faith, not its weakness.

believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6). And how does God regard such faith? He reckons the person who has it to be righteous – and when it comes to appearing before God, that is everything!

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

The relevance of this text is confirmed by the exposition of Paul the

apostle. Faith is still the appointed means through which the status of "righteous" is obtained.

How are sinners made righteous? The immediate answer is, they are pronounced "righteous" by God Almighty. However, a number of things had to take place for this to be accomplished. First, the real question is, "How can a righteous God justify sinners and remain righteous in doing so?" This is foreshadowed in the case of Abram. Although, like all of Adam's offspring, Abram was a sinner, it is not his sinfulness that is emphasized in Scripture. Rather, it is his faith; just as Paul's sinful past is not emphasized, but his apostleship.

Justification by faith is compared with justification by works. Works, however, cannot alter a person's character, nor can they expunge guilt, or remove the fact of sin. No amount of works, regardless of how arduous and thorough they may appear, can make men harmonious with God in their thoughts and ways. Even when men are given all of the particulars relative to doing, or working, they will find that what God requires exceeds all natural aptitude. 1,500 years of Law – precise, God-given Law – confirmed that this is the case.

SIN HAD TO BE JUDGED

In order for God to pronounce men free from the guilt of sin, sin had to be judged and condemned, for God can by no means "clear the guilty" (Ex 34:7), or "acquit the wicked" (Nah 1:3).

Therefore, God announced through Isaiah that He would take "the iniquity of us all" –i.e., sin in the aggregate– and lay it upon a solitary man (Isa 53:6). There, as the Christ

bore our "sins in His body on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24), God would "condemn sin in the flesh" of Christ (Rom 8:3). In this transaction, God is said to have "made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21). This was also the occasion when Jesus "was made a curse for us," redeeming us from the curse of the Law: "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal 3:10).

Now, with the penalty created by sin paid, and sin itself being put away, God counts one's faith for righteousness. Further, by that faith, the believer, through the Spirit, waits for "the hope of righteousness" (Gal 5:5). When Jesus returns, and shouts the dead from their graves, the saints will rise from the grave, and those alive will be changed instantly, ridding them of the infirmity of a mortal body. At that time, there will be no part of our being that is unrighteous. We will no longer be in a "vile body" (Phil 2:20-21). No more will we have a law in our members, warring against the law of our minds (Rom 7:23). We shall once and for all be delivered from "the body of this death" (Rom 7:25).

Until that time our faith is, in fact, our righteousness. This, however, does not ignore the matter of human conduct. While our righteousness is

embodied in our faith, it is expressed in our works – which is the point that James makes in his epistle to professed believers that were friends with the world (James 4:4).

The reckoning of a person being righteous is the outcome of grace, not of works. As it is written, "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom 4:3-5). Paul continues by calling David to the witness stand: "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin" (Rom 4:6-8).

All of those glorious benefits are in the bud of Genesis 15:6! Abram was bold and confident to believe God would do what He promised, and God was gracious and forthright to call him "righteous" because he did. Righteousness has always been received "by grace through faith!" – from Abel to this very day. Abram is the first extended example of this a standard by which faith is measured.

REFRESHING WATERS RENEWAL #24

The 2013 Refreshing Waters Renewal will be held August 6-August 8, 2013, at the Wildwood Baptist Church, Joplin, MO. The theme will be, "THE IDENTITY AND RELEVANCE OF THE GOSPEL." 15-17 speakers will develop this theme. Meetings are held throughout the entire day, with all meals being served by the sisters at The Word of Truth Fellowship. We offer accommodations with the various families of our fellowship as they are available. They are on a first-come-first-served basis. Address inquiries to givenb@aol.com.

Then You Will Know

"And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and THOU SHALT KNOW THAT THE LORD OF HOSTS HATH SENT ME unto thee" (Zech 2:11). "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and THOU SHALT KNOW THAT THE LORD OF HOSTS HATH SENT ME unto you" (Zech 4:9). "And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and YE SHALL KNOW THAT THE LORD OF HOSTS HATH SENT ME unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God" (Zech 6:15).

"Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you." These are the words of the revealing angel who was making these things known to Zechariah (4:1,4,5), and with whom he was talking (4:2,5,13). They were also words the prophet would no doubt relay to Zerubbabel and the people. A project was under way to rebuild the Temple, and it was headed up by Zerubbabel. However, the work was not progressing as well as was desired. As a consequence, discouragement was setting in, and some people began to doubt that the work could ever be finished – even though God Himself had commanded that it be done.

Now comes a word from heaven that the completion of the building of the Temple would confirm that the work itself had been ordained and commissioned by God. Although the work involved the labors of men, it

was not originated by them.

This was an appointed work – one that was initiated from heaven, and into which men were drawn by God. The Lord had "stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" to commission that the temple be built (2 Chron 36:22; Ezra 1:1; Isa 45:13). He had also summoned kings Darius and Artaxerxes to the work, moving them to command the work to be done (Ezra 6:14). The spirits of the chief of

This was an appointed work – one that was initiated from heaven, and into which men were drawn by God.

the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, the priests, the Levites, and others, had been "raised," or stirred up, by God to "go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:5). Ezra had been moved to prepare the people for the Temple by returning to holiness (Ezra 10:10-16). Nehemiah had been moved to rebuild the walls around the holy city (Neh 2:13-18). There was no question about it, this was the work of God!

The point, however, was the completion of the work – finishing what God had commissioned to be done. The angel apprises the prophet that when the house of God was complet-

ed, then he and the people would “know the Lord of hosts” had sent him.

TWICE HEARD. This is not initial knowledge, but confirming knowledge. It is when the truth comes home to the heart the second time. David referred to this kind of knowledge when he said, “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God” (Psa 62:11). This is the knowledge that confirms the soul – the inner witness that brings stability. It is a deeper knowledge that is more related to faith than the intellect.

The angel has already mentioned this kind of knowledge twice to Zechariah. “For, behold, I will shake mine hand upon them, and they shall be a spoil to their servants: and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me” (2:9). And again, “And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto thee” (2:11). What a precious knowledge this is!

EZEKIEL. The Lord frequently speaks of this kind of knowledge – the knowledge that comes from seeing the fulfillment of what He has promised. How poignantly it was revealed to Ezekiel. “And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD” (Ezek 37:14). And again, “And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land

of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezek 20:38).

ISAIAH. Isaiah also spoke in this manner when he foretold the restoration of the Jews. “Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their face toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me” (Isa 49:22-23).

JOEL. In his declaration of the era of the New Covenant, Joel also mentioned this kind of knowledge. “The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more” (Joel 3:17).

JESUS. Jesus also spoke in this manner. “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (John 8:28).

It is my prayer that in this coming year, you will have some of these confirming experiences – times when you will be able to say, “Now I know!” Such times generate a confidence and assurance that cannot be equaled.

Do IT! -- DO it!

"His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, DO IT." (John 2:5)

The occasion was a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, and Jesus and His disciples were present, together with His mother, Mary. When they ran out of wine, Mary told Jesus of the circumstance, but He replied, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4). Mary, sensing this did not mean Jesus was not going to do anything, but that He was operating

It is good to remember that when the Lord tells us to do something, we do well to engage in the doing of it – whatever it may be.

according to a higher agenda, told the servants, "Do whatever He tells you" (NIV). Now, there is a word that is still appropriate to be spoken!

It is good to remember that when the Lord tells us to do something, we do well to engage in the doing of it – whatever it may be. It is out of order to first sift it through your ideas of what you think can or cannot be done. Get to the doing of what the Lord requires of you. The fact that He said to do it is proof enough that you can, for His word is always "with power" (Lk 4:32). Even demons do what He tells them.

How wrong is it for men not to do so?

Here are a few considerations concerning what the Lord expects His people to do.

1. **PERSONAL CLEANSING** – "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor 7:1)

2. **DILIGENT RUNNING** – "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." (Heb 12:1)

3. **BE HOLY** – "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation." (1 Pet 1:15)

4. **HAVE A PROPER AFFECTION** – "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." (Col 3:2)

5. **SUBMIT TO GOD AND RESIST THE DEVIL** – "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:7)

6. **WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION** – "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always

obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil 2:12)

7. PUT ON THE WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD – "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." (Eph 6:11)

8. PUT EVIL EXPRESSIONS TO DEATH – "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Col 3:5)

9. ABSTAIN FROM WRONG DESIRES – "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul." (1 Pet 2:11)

10. DO NOT SIN – "Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame." (1 Cor 15:34)

That will do for starters. Take such admonitions seriously, and do not set yourself to explain why you are not presently engaged in the doing of them. If you do not take the Lord seriously, you certainly should not expect Him to take you seriously.

YOU "ARE" (a state of being) IN CHRIST JESUS

1. You "ARE" not under the law, but under grace (Rom 6:14).
2. You "ARE" now ashamed of the things you did before knowing the Lord (Rom 6:21).
3. You "ARE" not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God dwells in you (Rom 8:9).
4. You "ARE" God's husbandry, and you are God's building (1 Cor 3:9).
5. You "ARE" the temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17).
6. You "ARE" Christ's (1 Cor 3:23).
7. You "ARE" washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11).
8. You "ARE" bought with a price and are not your own (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23).
9. You "ARE" the epistle of Christ (2 Cor 3:3).
10. You "ARE" the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:27).
11. If you "ARE" led by the Spirit, you are not under the law (Gal 5:18).
12. You "ARE" called in one hope of your calling (Eph 4:4).
13. You "ARE" sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise (Eph 4:30).
14. You "ARE" complete in Christ (Col 2:10).
15. You "ARE" circumcised with the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11).
16. You "ARE" risen with Christ through faith in the operation of God (Col 2:12).
17. You "ARE" dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (Col 3:3).
18. You "ARE" the children of light (1 Thess 5:5).
19. You "ARE" come unto Mount Zion, the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, an innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the firstborn, God the Judge of all, Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel (Heb 12:22-24).
20. You "ARE" a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people (1 Pet 2:9).
21. You "ARE" of God and have overcome the world (1 John 4:4).

I PRESS TOWARD THE MARK

"I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil 3:14)

"I press toward THE MARK," Paul confessed. "THE mark!" So far as he was concerned, there was no other worthy objective; no other goal so compelling and rewarding. "The MARK!" Something identifiable, not vague. It was something he could perceive and understand. When his heart was fastened upon it, he adjusted the course of his life appropriately. It allowed him to get his spiritual bearings. Elsewhere, he used glorious phrases to denote its reality. He referred to a "blessed hope and glorious appearing" (Tit. 2:13). He mentioned an "anchor for the soul, both sure and steadfast" (Heb. 6:19), and a "city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). He spoke of receiving a "crown of righteousness" (2 Tim. 4:8), and "ever" being "with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

The future was not ambiguous for Paul, and it should not be for you! One of the undeniable marks of a degenerate and failing church is its lack of confidence concerning the future. This is the dark spot on the horizon of the fearful and unbelieving – the future.

But what was "the mark" or "goal" toward which Paul pressed? Note that it is immediately related to "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). This is the objective of the heavenly calling. It is the reason for the remission of sins. It is

the motivation for Christ saving His people from their sins (Matt 1:21). This is why people believe. It is why they obey God. It is why they perfect "holiness in the fear of the Lord" (2 Cor. 7:1). It is why they "run with patience the race that is set before them" (Heb. 12:1). It is why they "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12).

The "mark," from one point of view, is "eternal life." That is the sum and substance of the blessing. It is the "gift of God" (Rom. 6:23). That is a summary view of our involvement in "the world

The "mark," from one point of view, is "eternal life." That is the sum and substance of the blessing. It is the "gift of God."

to come" (Mark 10:30). Your "continuance in well doing" will be rewarded with "eternal life" (Rom. 2:7). We are "justified by His grace" in order that we might "be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Tit. 1:2). The "exceeding great and precious promises" that have been given to us can be compressed into a single promise. "And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2:25). The "eternal life" that we have now is a pledge of the fullness we will enjoy in the world to come. That is a

“mark” worthy of consistent and unflagging effort!

From another point of view, you might see “the mark” as life’s finish line. It is the point at which the race ends. Paul caught a glimpse of it before he left his body. It prompted him to say, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

His warfare was good! His faith enabled him to complete the strenuous course appointed to him. It had led him through perils (2 Cor. 11:26). It led him through weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10). It led him through the rejection of many to whom he preached. He had to press on with infirmity (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Sometimes he had to press forward alone, with his brethren forsaking him (2 Tim. 4:10). Sometimes it led through discouraging incarceration (2 Cor. 11:23). Sometimes when he was isolated in the midst of a sea for a day and a night (2 Cor. 11:25). But “the mark” kept him going! It was a dominating goal with which the world simply could not compete!

He was dominated by the same spirit as the patriarchs. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psa. 42:1-2). “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb.

11:16). Every professed believer should ask himself if God is ashamed to be called his God!

In our text, Paul relates “the mark” with “the resurrection of the dead” (v. 11). He is not saying that he wants to simply participate in the resurrection of the dead; every one will do that (Acts 24:15). He desires that the resurrection be the answer to the dichotomy his regeneration produced. For believers, “the resurrection from the dead” is the culmination of faith. Then we will be made “every whit whole,” and all adversarial relationships will be abruptly terminated.

SALVATION

NOT AN END OF ITSELF!

It may come as a startling surprise to many to hear this. Salvation is the appointed means to the end! It prepares us for the future by removing our past and giving us power in the present. But “the mark” is the real issue! It is “the mark” that must be reached. It does no good to enter this race if you do not finish it! A “heavenly call” offers no consolation prize for those who do not end up there!

“The mark” is experienced now in a firstfruits sense. The righteousness for which we “wait” will be fully experienced there, if tasted by faith now (Rom. 4:20-24). The presence of the Lord, which will be “face to face” then, is enjoyed by faith now as we “fellowship” with the Son (1 Cor. 1:9). The devil, who will be banished then, may be successfully resisted now -- every time he is confronted!

These firstfruits experiences are what keep us pressing. Without them, we would soon fall by the way.

THE TRUTH, WHEN KNOWN, WILL MAKE YOU FREE

“God will not trust thee with the stock of grace; it is not in thy hand, but in the hand of Christ; and this is the condition of the strongest godly man in the world; he must go daily and continually to Christ to fetch a new supply, or he cannot subsist.” -- Jeremiah Burroughs

FAITH COMES FROM GOD

I never tire of being reminded that faith COMES to us from God – that is why all men do not have it. Bear with me while I once again cite these marvelous passages, which were so long hidden from my understanding. “Faith COMES...” [Rom 10:17; Gal 3:23]. “For unto you it is GIVEN in the behalf of Christ... to believe on Him” [Phil 1:29]. “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who BY [through] HIM do believe in God” [1 Pet 1:20-21]. “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, FROM God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” [Eph 6:23]. “...who [Apollus], when he was come, helped them much which had believed THROUGH GRACE” [Acts 18:27]. “And FAITH and love which is in Christ Jesus” [1 Tim 1:14]. “... to them who have OBTAINED like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God.” [2 Pet 1:1]

WRONG HELPERS

*"Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, **Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath commanded us.**" (Ezra 4:2-3)*

At the appointed time, after seventy years, the Babylonian captivity came to its appointed end. During those seventy years the children of Judah "served the king of Babylon," as Jeremiah had prophesied (Jer 25:11). After that period of Judah's chastening, the Lord said He would "punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, for their iniquity" (Jer 25:12). It is as though the chastening hand of the Lord was lifted from Judah and placed upon Babylon. On the other hand, according to His

promise through Jeremiah, God "visited" the children of Judah, performing His "good word toward" them, and "causing" them to return to their own land (Jer 29:10). Daniel was blessed to conclude from the writings of Jeremiah that this was going to begin taking place while he remained in Babylon (Dan 9:2).

The return of the Jews to their own land was not a simplistic one with no inconveniences or challenges.

The return of the Jews to their own land was not a simplistic one with no inconveniences or challenges. First, God raised up Cyrus, king of Persia, commissioning him to see to it that His house was rebuilt in Jerusalem (2 Chron 36:22-23). Cyrus called upon the Jews who were willing, to rally to the cause, and return to Jerusalem for the rebuilding of the Temple, bringing with them a freewill offering (Ezra 1:3-4). The Spirit of God moved upon "the chief fathers of Judah and Benjamin" to "go up to build the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem." Those who were around them "strengthened their hands" with an abundant and willing offering for the project. Cyrus also brought back the vessels of the Lord's house that had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar and stored in Babylon (Ezra 1:5-7).

When the Jewish entourage arrived in Jerusalem, they first built "the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God" (Ezra 3:2). Upon finishing the altar,

It was at this point that “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity “buidled the temple unto the LORD God of Israel”

they offered sacrifices and “kept the feast of tabernacles, as it is written” (Ezra 3:3-6). Because “the foundation of the Temple was not yet laid,” they “gave money” and supplies to the workers to begin the work, taking the funds from “the grant” they had received from Cyrus (Ezra 3:7).

In the second year after their arrival in Jerusalem, the work finally got under way under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the priests, with the Levites also being duly appointed (Ezra 3:8). Working zealously, they completed laying the foundation for the house of God: “And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid” (Ezra 3:11).

It was at this point that “the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity “buidled the temple unto the LORD God of Israel” (Ezra 4:1). These were actually Samaritans with which the Assyrian kings had repopulated the land of Israel (Ezra 4:9-10). These people did not welcome the returning Jews when they came. They did not give an offering or supplies for the work.

They did not ask to participate in the laying of the foundation, that difficult beginning of the work. Instead, they waited until the second year to come forward with their request. “Let us build with you!” They said they were seeking the same God as the Jews: “for we seek your God, as ye do.” They said they had a history of

doing “sacrifice unto Him” for a long time, even “since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur,” who lived about 135 years before that time (2 Kgs 19:37). However, these people did not serve God only, but were among those who “feared the LORD, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence” (2 Kgs 17:33). Further, as indicated in the above text, they served “their own gods” in the land of Israel, maintaining the idolatrous manners of the lands from which they had been taken to be transplanted in Israel (2 Kgs 17:27-32).

Zerubbabel did not hesitate to answer these local pretenders. “Ye have nothing to do with us to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the LORD God of Israel” (Ezra 4:3). Two things disqualified these people. First, God had not called them to the work. Second, their allegiance to “their own gods” disqualified them from the work. This angered the people making the request, and they “weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building.” They even “hired counselors against them, to frustrate their purpose,” and wrote letters of “accusation” against them (Ezra 4:4-6). Thus their real enmity against God and His people was confirmed.

There are still people who are not really devoted to God who say they want to help in His work. Such people must still be told that they really have nothing to do with the work of the

Lord. There are many works with noble beginnings that finally were brought to a dissolution because ungodly people became involved in them. Soiled money was used, and unholy alliances were formed because it appeared necessary to do so. When doing the work of the Lord, it is essen-

tial that purity and true commitment be maintained. This, of course, has much to do with the modern, supposedly Christian work of fund-raising. Care must be taken not to solicit the assistance of people who are not themselves serving God. The work of God is holy, and they are not.

IF YE BE CHRIST'S

"And if ye be Christ's . . ." (Gal 3:29a). Other versions read, "if you belong to Christ,"^{NASB} "If you are the Messiah's,"^{MRD} "if ye are of Christ,"^{YLT} and "And if you belong to Christ [are in Him Who is Abraham's Seed]."^{AMPLIFIED}

And what does it mean to "be Christ's," or "belong to Christ?" In view of what is affirmed of these people, it is critical that we have a good understanding of the statement. This cannot be a mere formal identity, or one that is primarily outward. There are multitudes of people who are identified with Abraham after the flesh, yet are not his in the promisory sense of the word. It is even said of fleshly Israel, "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom 9:8). I will here deal with a few of the aspects of belonging to Christ.

There are multitudes of people who are identified with Abraham after the flesh, yet are not his in the promisory sense of the word.

GIVEN TO CHRIST

First, these are the children who have been given to Christ by God. The gift was facilitated by drawing them to Christ. Therefore Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37). He then added, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:44). He then added, "But there are some of you that believe not . . . Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (John 6:64-65). This is a wonderful aspect of salvation that prohibits all human boasting.

In the process of bringing the sons to glory, Jesus says of them, "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand" NKJV (John 10:29). On the night of His betrayal, He referred to His followers as those God had given to Him (John 17:6-12). In the end, the glorified Christ will say of the body of the redeemed, "And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given Me" (Heb 2:13). The apostles' doctrine makes a point of the fact that Christ received those given to Him. "Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom 15:7).

PURCHASED, OR BOUGHT

We belong to Christ because He has bought us. As it is written, "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:20). And again, "Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men" (1 Cor 7:23). The entire church is described as having been "purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). Therefore we belong to Christ because He has paid a staggering price for us. It is a strictly legal transaction, being honored in heaven. This is such a firm foundation that a Divine assessment is made in view of it. There is every reason to possess the strong confidence that is derived from the spiritual knowledge of this fact. It is totally unreasonable to be a slave of the Law when we have been freed by a God-honored purchase.

ADDED TO THE LORD

It is said of the effects of believing and obeying the Gospel, "and believers were the more added to the Lord" (Acts 5:14). Some versions read, "added to their number." However, most, if not all, Greek manuscripts read "Lord" (kuri,w|), not "number." This is another way of saying they were "set" in the body, "as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor 12:18), therefore belonging to Him. In a secondary sense "added to the Lord" refers to becoming a part of His family, or household. In that sense also, they belong to Him.

JOINED TO THE LORD

It is said of those in Christ, "But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor 6:17). The closest of all earthly relationships is that of a husband to his wife. They become "one flesh" (Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31). However, here is a transcendent association

that soars far beyond the flesh: "one spirit." That involves having His mind, and being conformed to His image. Such people belong to Christ.

CALLED INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST

Being called into fellowship with Christ is involved with belonging to Him. He has not been called into our fellowship, we have been called into His. As it is written, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). Belonging to Christ involves infinitely more than Him being available to us. It includes the blessedness of being "taught by Him" (Eph 4:21).

BETROTHED TO CHRIST

We cannot overlook belonging to Christ by means of betrothal – the prospect of being His "wife." That glorious expectation involves making ourselves ready for the consummation of the betrothal (Rev 19:7). In this respect, belonging to Him requires remaining a "chaste virgin," not prostituting our affection to others (2 Cor 11:2-3).

A DISCIPLE OF CHRIST

Finally, belonging to Christ describes the association of disciple to his Master. This requires forsaking all (Lk 14:33), denying self and taking up our cross (Lk 9:23), and placing all other personalities into a subordinate position (Lk 14:26).

Belonging to Christ is not a mere technicality. If the association is real, it will be attended with certain undeniable evidences. Let it be clear that our text assumes all of the things I have just mentioned, and more. No person has the right to claim identity with Jesus Christ who lacks the evidence thereof. If the person does, in

fact, belong to Christ, then what is now affirmed applies to them without any equivocation whatever. All that is "in Christ" belongs to them!

THE SALVATION OF GOD

"Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28)

What is *"the salvation of God?"* The Psalmist said God would "show the salvation of God" to the person who offered praise to Him and ordered his conduct correctly (Psa 50:23). John the Baptist boldly announced, *"all flesh shall see the salvation of God"* (Luke 3:6). Surely this message ranks high in the things men are intended to hear!

"Deliverance" and "preservation" are synonyms for salvation, emphasizing what we are delivered from, and preserved for. Other English synonyms include "conservation," "keeping," "safekeeping," "sustentation," "rescue," "sustain," "maintain," "safeguard," "shield," "spare," "defend," and "protect." In the Hebrew language, "save" includes the idea of "deliverance," "rescue," and "prosperity." In the Greek language it carries the idea of "rescue," "safety," and "deliverance." What a large word!

Perhaps the most visible deliverance was Israel's rescue from the hand of Pharaoh and his armies.

There are both physical and spiritual deliverances. Perhaps the most visible deliverance was Israel's rescue from the hand of Pharaoh and his armies. That memorable experience, when the Red Sea parted for the Israelites and closed upon the Egyptians, was called "the SALVATION of the Lord" (Exod. 14:13). Upon the completion of that mighty rescue, the people of God sang, "The Lord is my Strength and my Song, and He is become my SALVATION . . ." (Exod. 15:2). That occasion serves to demonstrate the

nature of salvation: The enemy is subdued and God's people are rescued from danger.

Similarly, and in a depiction of the salvation possessed in Christ Jesus, when king Saul soundly defeated the Ammonites, he said of the occasion, "the Lord hath wrought SALVATION in Israel" (1 Sam 11:11-13). During the reign of Jehoshaphat, when the Ammonites and Moabites came against Israel, God moved them to destroy each other rather than fight against Israel. The Lord informed them of what He was going to do through Jahaziel who said, "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the SALVATION of the LORD with you, O Judah and Jerusalem: fear not, nor be dismayed; to morrow go out against them: for the LORD will be with you" (2 Chron 20:17).

There is also the idea of being delivered from this present evil world.

In Christ, salvation extends beyond the seen. "The salvation of our God" (Psa. 52:10) now deals with eternal issues, not merely temporal ones! The term is used no less than 43 times following Christ's exaltation. A careful examination of the texts will reveal that every single one of them refers to a spiritual salvation – a salvation having to do with unseen, yet very real circumstances (Luke 1:69,77; 2:30; 3:6; 19:9; John 4:22; Acts 4:12; 13:26,47; 16:17; 28:28; Rom. 1:16; 10:10; 11:11; 13:11; 2 Cor. 1:6; 7:10; Eph. 1:3; 6:17; Phil. 1:19,28; 2:12; 1 Thess. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; 3:15; Titus 2:11; Heb. 1:4, 2:3,10; 5:9; 6:9; 9:28; 1 Pet. 1:5,9,10; 2 Pet. 3:15; Jude 3; Rev. 7:10; 19:1; 12:10).

This "eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9) proclaims the overthrow of Satan, and the preservation of man. It speaks of the maintenance of life as well as its genesis. It includes the idea of protection and sustenance. Under the heading of SALVATION the saints are provided a way of escape from every temptation (1 Cor 10:13). They are enabled to "resist the devil" (James 4:7), and cast down high thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3-5). SALVATION includes the matter of Christ's intercession for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25). It also involves the intercession of the Holy Spirit who dwells within the believer (Rom 8:26-27). There is

also the maintenance of the saved one, portrayed as God making him stand (Rom 14:4), and keeping him from falling (Jude 1:24).

There is also the idea of being delivered from this present evil world (Gal 1:4), so that it is no longer able to hold the believer captive. It includes protecting the child of God so that no influence external to the believer is able to separate him from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:35-39). Once this salvation is embraced, Satan is powerless to dominate man, and man is able to enter into personal relation with God.

Salvation also involves spiritual nourishment. "In the day of SALVATION have I succored thee," proclaims the Lord (2 Cor. 6:2). That is, Satan's subduement and man's liberty not only consist of an initial deliverance, but of continued safety, sustenance, and growth.

In addition, this wonderful word encompasses man's final deliverance from the temporal order, when the faithful shall be raised from the dead and joyfully inducted into the very presence of the Almighty. It is in this sense that the word is used in Romans 13:11. "Now is our SALVATION nearer than when we believed." This is truly an "eternal salvation" (Heb 5:9). It commences with the remission of sins, and it finally brings the saved one into the very presence of God Himself, and the Lord Jesus Christ, where they will dwell forever.

THE EXHORTATION "BE YE HOLY" (1 Pet 1:15-16) IS TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. THESE DAYS THE MODERN CHURCH IS NOT SETTING A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOLINESS. IN FACT, THERE IS ALTOGETHER TOO MUCH UNHOLINESS FOUND IN IT. THIS CONDITION NEUTRALIZES ANYTHING THAT IT SAYS.

THE DIVINE REFINER



"But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness."

(Malachi 3:2-3)

INTRODUCTION

Having soundly rebuked the priests for their unfaithfulness, the Lord is now turning their attention to His own faithfulness. He is also

That Messenger will fully answer the basic longings of those who receive Him: they will "delight in" Him.

confirming that their work, while essential within the framework of the covenant under which they operated, was not the primary work. It is what God Himself is doing that is fundamental. The relationship of men to that work is also their primary responsibility.

Men are never to imagine that God is present for the basic purpose of meeting their need, or seeing to their comfort and success. All self-centeredness is traced to the erroneous postulate that what happens to men is the primary thing. Everything that is "in the world" is based upon their false premise: "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). This three-fold breakdown of "the world" postulates the centrality of self, and is the fountain from which all disobedience and sin originate. It is not possible to sin without thinking that self is preeminent. In this passage God is confirming that what He has determined to do is the very reason for the existence of the world, everything in it, and humanity itself. Correctness of both motives and life is measured by the personal awareness and understanding of this. The approach to life is to be developed and maintained with what God is doing in mind. Here, the purpose of God centers in a solitary Person – "the Messenger of the covenant" (3:1). That Messenger will fully answer the basic longings of those who receive Him: they will "delight

This word concerns “the messenger of the covenant” – the One who makes known what the Lord has intended, and what He is doing.

in” Him. His locus of operation will not be the arena occupied by the mass of humanity, but will be “His temple” – the place where the Almighty makes Himself known and works. In other words, the context in which the Messiah is comprehended is the purpose of God, not the dilemmas of men. This is a purpose that is neither developed nor altered by the desires of men.

WHO MAY ABIDE THE DAY OF HIS COMING?

Malachi 3:2 “But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? for He is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap.”

This word concerns “the messenger of the covenant” – the One who makes known what the Lord has intended, and what He is doing. This is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only One who “knows the Father” (Matt 11:27). This has particular regard to the covenant, which is elsewhere referred to as “the promise” (Rom 4:13-20; Gal 3:14-19,22,29). Further, participation in this promise is summarized in these words: “And this is the promise that He hath promised us, even eternal life” (1 John 2:25).

WHO MAY ABIDE? Other versions read “endure,” ^{NKJV} “be faced,” ^{BBE} “able to think of,” ^{DOUAY} “able to resist,” ^{NJB} “is bearing,” ^{YLT} and “who can live.” ^{LIVING} Keep in mind, this is referring to Christ’s appearance in the form of a Man – when He first “came into the world” (1 Tim 1:15). Who will be able to endure THAT coming – or who will be able to profit from it? Who will be capable of thinking of it correctly, and of properly assessing the entrance of

“the Messenger of the covenant” into the world? Jesus Himself said of that entrance, “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind” (John 9:39). That circumstance is the reason for this question.

THE DAY OF HIS COMING. This is the day He came into the world – particularly when He was manifested to the world (John 2:11; 1 John 1:2; 3:5). Who will be able to see that time correctly, and to perceive what God was really doing? John declared one of the reasons for that coming: “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). That is the day of reference. Who would be able to endure it?

WHO SHALL STAND? That day – the time when Jesus was manifested, or made known – was a time that would be the undoing of some. Speaking of that initial revelation, Simeon announced that “the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:25). Jesus said of those who did not perceive Him, “your sin remaineth” (John 9:41). That appearing revealed that some who were Jewish leaders were actually the children of the devil (John 8:44). They were unable to “stand” when “the Messenger of the covenant” came into the world. For them, the initial coming of the Lord meant condemnation, for “this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

WHEN HE APPEARETH. There was something disconcerting about

the appearance of Christ – when He was made evident to the people. When He was born, it awakened a spirit of murder in Herod (Matt 2:16). When He ministered among the people, doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38), “the chief priests . . . were sore displeased” (Matt 21:15). They “sought to lay hands on Him” (Matt 21:45), and “consulted how they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill Him” (Matt 26:3). They were not able to abide the day of His coming, or stand when He appeared. For them, the appearance of a Savior meant their own condemnation. I think this aspect of Jesus’ ministry is largely unknown in our time. This is partly owing to the lack of a proper proclamation of Him, as well as the refusal to accept Him in the capacity in which God sent Him into the world.

HE IS LIKE A REFINERS FIRE.

Here the heavenly “Messenger” is not likened to a refiner, but to the fire a refiner uses. He is not likened to a fuller, or launderer, but to the soap that such a person uses. This is another aspect of the Lord being “a consuming fire” (Deut 4:24; 9:3; Heb 12:29). That is, when this Messenger is made known, or comes, defilement will not be able to remain. The Psalmist wrote, “A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about” (Psa 97:3). When Daniel saw a vision of the Lord he noted, “A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him” (Dan 7:10).

LIKE FULLER’S SOAP. This has to do with cleansing from iniquity – removing the filth that is caused by sin (Jer 2:22). From the standpoint of effect, it has to do with making something “white as snow” – removing all impurities (Mk 9:3).

The presence of the Lord will bring purity – one way or another.

Either it will bring holiness to the individual, or that person will be destroyed. Defilement will not stand in the presence of the Lord. The Lord must be presented to the people in this manner. If the people want Jesus, then they must prepare themselves to either be purged or destroyed, purified or removed. His presence has a cleaning effect – like a refiner’s fire or fuller’s soap. Those who imagine that they can possess Jesus, yet remain defiled, are simply wrong – and there is no way to make that truth more palatable. This is how Jesus will come “the second time,” in “flaming fire” (2 Thess 1:8). Men glibly talk about being “seeker friendly,” as though the main objective is to be friendly toward sinners. While there may very well be a speck of truth in this, it certainly is not a primary view of the matter. It is actually God who is the ultimate Seeker, and He is looking for those who tremble at His word (Isa 66:2), and whose heart is perfect toward Him (2 Chron 16:9). For such people, He will purge them from their iniquity, but for the others, He will ultimately purge them from His presence. That is the real Lord!

HE SHALL SIT AS A REFINER

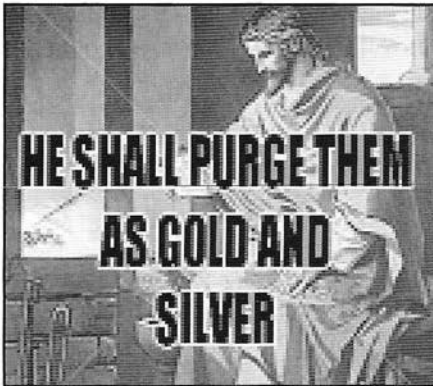
3:3a “And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver . . .”

The real “Messenger” does not acclimate Himself to the ungodly, learning to live with their infirmities and weaknesses. He does not leave them as they are, or allow what alienated them from Him to remain with them. Remember, this is Malachi’s revelation of the coming Messiah – the One who would declare and implement the New Covenant. A Savior who does not fit this description is a spurious one – invented by the devil

himself.

HE SHALL SIT AS A REFINER. Other versions read, "sit as a smelter," ^{NASB} "take His seat, testing," ^{BBE} "will be like a Refiner and Purifier," ^{CSB} "sit down to try and fine," ^{GENEVA} "He will act like," ^{GWN} "take His seat as Refiner and Purifier," ^{NJB} and "He will sit and closely watch as the dross is burned away." ^{LIVING}

By saying "sit as," the Lord means that this is the role of the Messiah. This is His ministry, or purpose. This is why He will come. He is a Messenger, but not merely a Messenger. He comes to DO something as well as say something. Those who have grown accustomed to being



defiled are not under the care of the Savior – for He sits as a Refiner and Purifier. You may be sure, He does not fail in His work, for then He would be disobedient to the One who sent Him! I understand that this kind of Jesus is being presented to the people – a Savior who does not really refine and purify the people. But that is not the real Jesus! Just as surely as Jesus was seated to reign (Psa 110:1-2; Acts 2:34-36), He was also seated to refine and purify. There really is no such thing as a reigning Jesus who does not refine and purify, perfecting, and cleansing. Apostolic doctrine con-

sistently associates the Lord Jesus with cleansing, washing, and purifying (1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; Tit 2:14; Heb 1:3; 1 John 1:7; Rev 1:5).

HE SHALL PURIFY THE SONS OF LEVI. This has particular regard to the priests who, in Malachi's day, were defiled and worthy only of rebuke. The prophecy is saying that a day was coming when those who represented the Lord would no longer be defiled. The defilement of the priesthood was an aspect of the Law being "weak through the flesh" (Rom 8:3). However, the Messenger of the covenant would not declare a covenant after that order. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New would not be weakened by the condition of those who served within it. That condition would not be because defilement would then be tolerated, but because the "Messenger of the covenant" would "purify the sons of Levi" – the priesthood.

HE SHALL PURGE THEM AS GOLD AND SILVER. Both gold and silver are purged, or purified, by having their impurities removed through the refiner's fire. This is something the "Messenger of the covenant," the Lord Jesus Christ, would do. From a covenantal point of view, it is said of the covenant of reference, "their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:12; 10:17). This would also fulfill another promise made by Jeremiah: "And I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, whereby they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, whereby they have sinned, and whereby they have transgressed against Me" (Jer 33:8). The question is, how will all of this be accomplished? The purifying of the people was not a simplistic process accomplished by a Divine fiat, or word.

First, the sin had to be judged, for

it had reproached God and driven a wedge between man and God. Therefore, God gathered the sins of humanity and laid them upon Christ (Isa 53:6). Having bore our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24), Jesus took them away – all of them (John 1:29). This was accomplished through God’s own judgment, who cursed Jesus the sin-bearer (Gal 3:13). That work was a very real judgment of sin. Now, God could not only justify sinners, but be righteous in doing so (Rom 3:26).

Second, the individuals involved must be forgiven, which involved the purging of their conscience – a process in which a sense of defiling guilt was removed from the transgressors. Therein, “the knowledge of salvation” was granted to the forgiven ones (Lk 1:77), and the conscience cleansed, or purged (Heb 9:9-14; 10:22; 1 Pet 3:21).

Third, the matter of the dominating propensity to sin must be dealt a devastating blow. The sinner must be converted (Acts 3:19), and his nature changed (Ezek 36:36), so that he is a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10). The people themselves must be refined, or made pure. They could not be left the way they were. That is fundamental in this matter.

THE MANNER OF THE NEW COVENANT

Under the Old Covenant, the priests were a selected group of people – the Levites. Ideally speaking, the Jews were intended to be a “kingdom of priests,” wholly devoted to the Lord (Ex 19:6). God told them they would be called “the Priests of the Lord,” and “the Ministers of the sanctuary” (Isa 61:5). However, because of the unchanged nature of the people, this could not be accomplished under the First Covenant. Therefore the Lord

took the Levites from among the people, making them His ministers (Num 3:12; 8:18; 18:6). But it is not so in Christ. Now, in Christ Jesus, all of the people are called “priests” (Rev 1:5; 5:10; 20:6), a “holy priesthood” (1 Pet 2:5), and “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9). Therefore, the promise of our text is gloriously fulfilled in them.

THAT THEY MAY OFFER AN OFFERING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

2:3b “. . . that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”

There is a purpose that is served by the people being refined, having personal impurity removed from them, as well as the lingering guilt of iniquity. The ultimate aim was not simply to forgive the people of their sins. To have a clean and pure people is not the end of the matter. Rather, it is an ordained means to an appointed end. If this objective is not met, there is no good reason for sins to be forgiven and people to be made pure.

THAT THEY MAY. Other versions read, “so that they may,” NASB “Then the Lord will have men who,” NIV “until they,” NRSV and “so that they can.” CSB The dreadful situation was that Malachi was testifying to a body of priests and people whose offerings God would not accept (Mal 1:10). Isaiah also told the people to stop their religious service, because it was offensive to God (Isa 1:11-13). Jeremiah also testified to this offense, asking what purpose was served by their offerings (Jer 6:20). Amos did the same (Amos 5:21-23).

To have a people whose offerings God will not accept, is itself an unacceptable situation. There is, in such a case, no sustainable purpose served by having a special people. If the people are incapable of pleasing the Lord, who can present a sound reason for

the Lord being identified with them? Here we learn something about the Lord Himself. In order for men to be received by Him, they must be made suitable to serve Him.

OFFER UNTO THE LORD. The purpose of the refining, or purifying, is that the people might "offer unto the Lord." An unrefined people, therefore, are unsuitable to bring an offering to the Lord. The only reason God received sacrifices from some of the Israelites was in prospect of the coming "Messenger of the covenant" – the promised Seed of Abraham. Solemnly, God told Israel that when they came before Him, "none shall appear before Me empty" (Ex 23:15; 34:20; Deut 16:16). This is perfectly reasonable "seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). He has been too gracious for this to be ignored.

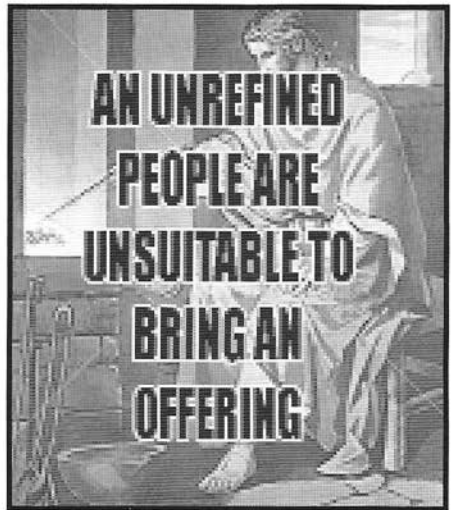
AN OFFERING IN RIGHTEOUSNESS. Other versions read, "offerings in righteousness," ^{NASB} "present right offerings to the Lord," ^{RSV} "offerings to ADONAI uprightly," ^{CJB} "acceptable offerings," ^{GWN} "due sacrifice," ^{NAB} "a proper offering," ^{NET} and "Do their work for God with pure hearts." ^{LIVING}

There is a twofold sense found in the reasoning of this statement – a sense that is garbled by some of the versions. Expressions like "right offerings," ^{RSV} "acceptable offerings," ^{GWN} "due sacrifice," ^{NAB} and "proper offering" ^{NET} come short of the meaning. First, the Refiner would refine the ones making the sacrifice, and not the sacrifice itself. The point is, that if the one offering the sacrifice is not purged, the sacrifice is rendered unacceptable. This is why, on the day of atonement, the high priest offered a sacrifice "first for himself," and only then for the others (Lev 16:6,11; Heb 7:27; 9:7).

In this text, the "righteousness"

of reference does not refer to the sacrifice itself, but to the one offering it. While imperfect high priests were allowed to offer sacrifices under the Law, those sacrifices were not sufficient to take away sin, or purge the consciences of the ones committing the sin. The whole system was tentative, designed to portray the coming High Priest, who would Himself be the offering as well as the One offering it. That sacrifice would be fully acceptable to God, and have eternal efficacy for those who accepted it by faith.

THE REAL SITUATION. A Lord who is not served by His people is not perceived as Lord to them, for there is no such thing as a Lord who is not served by His own. Further, in Christ



Jesus, priests who do not offer to God are no priests at all. It also ought to be noted that those who are made "priests unto God" are to be holy. It is required of them. Thus believers are commanded, "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation," or "be holy in all your conduct," (1 Pet 1:15-16). Hands that are lifted up to the Lord are to be "holy hands" (1 Tim 2:8). Holiness is to be aggressively pursued, "without which no man shall see the

Lord" (Heb 12:14). We are reminded that God has called us "unto holiness" (1 Thess 4:7), so how could anyone in an unholy state possibly justify that condition?

Any attempt to serve the Lord apart from holiness contradicts this prophecy by Malachi. He clearly states that "the Messenger of the covenant" will sit as a Refiner, purifying the priests in order that they might bring offerings to God in righteousness. God "cannot lie" (Tit 1:2). If it is possible for those in Christ to be fundamentally unrighteous, yet deliver offerings to God in righteousness, then this prophecy is not true, and

God has lied. In such a case, Christ's ministry has been misrepresented, and His sacrifice has not been effective.

It ought to be abundantly apparent that such things cannot possibly be true – not in any sense. If salvation and Divine acceptance are based upon the record that God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11), then that record cannot be flawed. If the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20), it is impossible for that foundation to have theological cracks in it, or not be precise in every one of its revealed details.

WHAT DO WE SAY TO THE EVOLUTIONARY HYPOTHESIS?

The evolutionary hypothesis denies the creation, that the creation was through Jesus Christ, and that it was made for a Divine purpose. It denies that God Himself is revealed in the creation (Rom 1:20), and it is deaf to the testimony of creation, which is sounded forth everywhere (Psa 19:1-3). It rejects the record of the origin of man, the revealed origin of marriage, and the origin of sin. It ignores the fact that man worshiped from the beginning, the first murder, and the first covering of human nakedness. It denies that the first man was made in image of God. It cannot account for the first man and woman being named (Gen 5:2), or the first provision of a wife (Gen 2:121-25). It rejects the facts of the tree of life (Gen 2:9), the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:9), the reality of Satan, and the temptation Satan hurled at Eve, which was at a rational level (Gen 3:1-24). It cannot account for the first marriage (Gen 2:23-24), the first birth (Gen 4:1), the first family (Gen 4:1-3), or the fact that the first man, Adam, bore a son in his own likeness (Gen 5:3). It rejects the fact that man was created for a purpose (Isa 43:7), that he devolved instead of evolved (Gen 1:27; 6:5), and became worse, rather than better. It denies the fall of man, the accountability of man to God (Acts 17:31), and the fact that God made promises pertaining to man (Gen 3:15). It provides no reason for man's presence, or a destiny toward which he is headed. It accents the environment rather than man, for whom the environment was made. Rather than man being the crowning creation of God, evolution presents him as the result of a process that took place over a staggeringly long period of time.

In view of this, what ought we to say to the myth of theistic evolution – the erroneous supposition that God created the heavens and the earth by means of an evolutionary process? Who is the person who would yield to such a hodge-podge of intellectual fodder? It is a person who does not have the fact and will of God at the center of his thinking. It is a person who is weak in thought, yielding to pretension, and rejecting revealed truth. That is who it is!

REFRESHING WATERS RENEWAL #24

AUGUST 6-8, 2013

WILDWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH

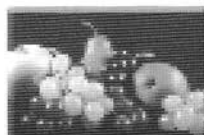
JOPLIN, MO

Theme

"THE IDENTITY AND RELEVANCE OF THE GOSPEL"

This theme has been chosen with the objective of these Renewals in mind:
TO CLARIFY THE NATURE AND CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel of Christ is the only message in the world that is the power of God unto salvation



BRINGING FORTH FRUIT WITH PATIENCE

"But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."
(Luke 8:15)

Jesus was going throughout every city and village preaching and showing the glad tidings of the Kingdom, and the twelve were with Him. Much people from every city gathered around Him, pressing to hear His words (8:1-4). At that time our Lord spoke to them "by a parable." It sounded like an agricultural lesson, but it was not. He spoke great Kingdom realities wrapped in the swaddling clothes of earthly circumstance. He spoke of a sower going out to sow seed – HIS seed. It belonged to him, and he sowed it everywhere. It looked as though he was scattering the seed indiscriminately, throwing it everywhere. Some of it fell upon a well trodden pathway, And the "fowls

of the air devoured it." Another portion of the seed fell upon rocky soil, and soon "withered away, because it lacked moisture." Yet another part of the seed "fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it." However, some of the precious seed "fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit up to an hundred-fold."

Jesus does not say an equal amount of seed fell upon the various soils, as though the path, rocky soil, thorny soil, and good soil each received 25% of the seed. Nor, indeed, did He suggest the sower was not wise in the manner in which he sowed his seed. The point was not how much seed was sown, but what happened to it after it was sown. Jesus gave no explanation of the parable to the multitudes who heard it. Rather, while He was speaking it, "He called out, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear'" (Lk 8:5-8, NIV). Only

His disciples inquired about the parable, asking what it might mean. Jesus told them, "To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God," declaring it was intentionally hidden from others (8:9-10, NASB).

In His explanation, Jesus said the seed was God's Word, and the soils were various kinds of hearers. Three of the soils produced no fruit – which appears to be the whole point for sowing the seed – but it is not. One function of sowing the seed is the revelation of the hearts of people, even making known who is incapable of producing fruit to God. We also learn that the Word will not bring forth fruit where there is a continuance of competing influences. They will eventually block the root from going downward, and the fruit from going upward.

Jesus accounted for the marvelous

productivity of the good soil – the ONLY soil that produced fruit – in three ways. First, they had "honest and good hearts." Second, having heard the Word of God, they "kept" it. Third, they brought forth fruit "with patience," or perseverance. They endured until the fruit came! They withstood and overcame hindering influences, refusing to relinquish their hold on the Word. That is the way "much fruit" is produced – fruit that glorifies God (John 15:8).

How "patient," or enduring, are you? Are you looking for fruit tomorrow, or are you holding on to the Word with an honest and good heart. Have you plotted out the time of the harvest, or are you devoting yourself to patience and endurance? Your patience will bring the fruit. You can count on that!

Are You a Disciple of Jesus?

A "disciple" of Jesus is someone who learns from Him. It is someone who follows Him and has a keen interest in what He says and does. The word "disciple" literally means "learner, pupil" (THAYER). The Gospels contain twenty-four references to "disciple," and two hundred and seventeen references to "disciples." The book of Acts contains twenty-nine references to "disciples." The word "disciple" accents one of Christ's primary ministry-roles. He is a Mediator and an Intercessor – both of which are essential to salvation being initiated and brought to its intended culmination. But He is also a Teacher, and a "disciple" identifies WHO He teaches.

Jesus told His disciples, "Go ye therefore, AND TEACH ALL NATIONS . . ." Other versions correctly accent

the objective of the teaching: "MAKE DISCIPLES of nations" (NKJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV). To make disciples is to make learners, students who will sit at the feet of Jesus and learn. A "disciple" is one who sees Jesus as the primary Teacher. Jesus said to the multitudes, "LEARN from me" (Matt 11:29, NKJV).

The modern church has not done well in making disciples of Jesus. There is too much ignorance of the things of God among professing Christians, too little understanding of the Scriptures, and too much contentment with these dreadful conditions.

I have heard a lot of preachers and teachers testifying to how they engage in efforts to reach the lost. They will offer the people forgiveness of sins, Divine help in all of their trou-

bles, and even personal advantages in this world. However, rarely do you hear anyone tell the masses that Jesus does not receive people indiscriminately. There are Divine qualifications for disciples – qualifications that MUST be met. Before you can learn from Jesus, or before He will teach an individual, certain conditions must be met. Here are some of them – and they were spoken by the Lord and Savior Himself.

1. SELF DENIAL AND CROSS BEARING. "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt 16:24). Self denial is refusing to be dominated by personal desires. Cross bearing is willingly embracing the repercussions of that choice.

2. DAILY CROSS BEARING AND FOLLOWING JESUS. "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The cross must be taken up every day. There can be no compromise with the flesh, no catering to it, and no course of action taken to avoid the result of self denial.

3. JESUS HAS PRIORITY OVER ONE'S FAMILY, AS WELL AS HIS OWN LIFE. "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also,

he CANNOT be My disciple" (Luke 14:26). Whenever there is a conflict between personal desires and the will of the Lord, the will of the Lord must prevail. If family members are in contradiction of Christ, He must be followed, and they must be rejected.

4. A PERSON IS EXCLUDED IF THEY DO NOT BEAR THEIR CROSS. "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, CANNOT be My disciple" (Luke 14:27). The cross is personal. It involves suffering for righteousness' sake. If a person refuses to do this, Jesus said they cannot be His disciple. He will not teach them!

5. FAILING TO FORSAKE ALL THAT ONE HAS EXCLUDES THE INDIVIDUAL FROM JESUS. "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he CANNOT be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

If there is any competing desire, person, or possession that requires the diminishment of one's allegiance to Christ, that thing must be forsaken. The failure to do this excludes one from the classroom of Jesus.

Let it be clear, that those who refuse to be Jesus' disciple have, by that very choice, forfeited salvation, for that is what Jesus ultimately administers.

IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD, A POWERLESS MESSENGER IS NO MESSENGER AT ALL. SOME OF THE THINGS THAT VALIDATE A GOD-SENT MESSENGER ARE: "BY PURENESS, BY KNOWLEDGE, BY LONGSUFFERING, BY KINDNESS, BY THE HOLY SPIRIT, BY LOVE UNFEIGNED, BY THE WORD OF TRUTH, BY THE POWER OF GOD, BY THE ARMOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ON THE RIGHT HAND AND ON THE LEFT" (2 Cor 6:6-7).

DIVISION IS A SIN

We are grateful for every follower of Jesus who desires for unity – godly unity – to be found in the professing church. However, it does appear that the fact that division is a sin has not duly registered on the consciences of many. Solemnly, the church is admonished to not allow divisions to be present, and to have the same mind and the same judgment (1 Cor 1:10). We are told that divisions are a sign of carnality (1 Cor 3:3), and are undeniable evidence of “heresies” (1 Cor 11:18). “Heresies,” or “factions,” NIV, are declared to be among the “works of the “flesh,” which pointedly are said to exclude one from the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21). We are also commanded to “avoid” those who cause divisions (Rom 16:17). I have attended a number of gatherings that were set forth as seeking unity among believers. This perspective, however, was never presented at those meetings. They were consistently approached as though there was simply a misunderstanding among the divided people.

Jesus defeated the devil, thoroughly and without remedy, at His weakest point. As it is written, “*He was crucified through weakness*” (2 Cor 13:4). There, on the cross, with the sword of Divinity sheathed, and in a voluntarily humbled state, the Lord Jesus plundered principalities and powers, making a show of them in His cross (Col 2:15). He also, through death, “*destroyed*” the devil (Heb 2:14). Now that He has been raised from the dead, and exalted at the right hand of God, what do you suppose He can do? All power has been given to Him in heaven and in earth (Matt 28:18). Principalities and powers have been subjected to Him (1 Pet 3:22). The church has no right to be weak and vacillating! No professing believer has a right to be overcome by the world, or to stumble in life as though he was walking in the darkness. **AWAKE!**

WHY ANOTHER GOSPEL?

Gal 1:6a "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him . . ."

I MARVEL. The word "marvel" is translated from a word that means to be stunned, astonished, dumbfounded, flabbergasted, and dismayed. It also carries the idea of being appalled and outraged. This reaction had been caused by an absolutely unreasonable condition – one that defied any kind of justification. There is no acceptable excuse for the condition Paul will now address. He does not ask the people to explain their condi-

The condition of the Galatian churches emitted a kind of noxious spiritual odor that was offensive to Paul.

tion, for any explanation will not be received. The condition Paul is dealing with contradicts the nature and intent of God's great salvation, betrays an unacceptable frame of mind, and a certain gullibility that is in no way acceptable. The condition of the Galatian churches emitted a kind of noxious spiritual odor that was offensive to Paul. It was the exact opposite of the "sweet savor of Christ" (2 Cor 2:15).

This is the kind of marveling that Jesus did when He was in "His own country," where He was raised. It is written, "He marveled because of their unbelief" (Mk 6:6). It is the kind of reaction the Lord had to Israel: "And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isa 59:16). Considering the amount of revelation that had

been given to Israel, and the fact that the Son of God was raised in Nazareth, the very existence of such great unbelief was abrasive to the Lord. It defied all logic, and there was no need to speak in defense of such a people. That is the sort of thing that is reflected in Paul's words.

SO SOON. The condition of which Paul will speak had happened quickly – so promptly that it caused him to marvel. The Galatians had been exposed to extensive preaching and teaching. Paul and Barnabas had traveled "throughout . . . the region of Galatia," establishing the churches in the faith (Acts 16:5-6). Later, Paul had gone "over all the country of Galatia . . . strengthening the disciples" (Acts 18:23). They had participated with other churches in the gathering of a special offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:1). Those ministries covered a period of over two years (50-52 A.D.). That was sufficient time for the brethren there to have been firmly established. However, a condition had arisen within a very brief time, in spite of all of the investments that had been made in them.

REMOVED FROM HIM. The word translated "removed" has the following meaning: "to fall away or desert from one person or thing to another," ^{THAYER} "to effect a change of location in space, with the implication that the two locations are significantly different - 'to move from one place to another, to change one's location, to depart, departure,'" ^{LOWE-NIDA} and

“changing one's loyalty as a follower; turn from, desert, become apostate.”

FRIBERG

The “Him” of reference is God Himself, and the charge is that the Galatians had left Him, deserted Him, and exchanged Him for some lesser approach to religion. They had defected, abandoned the Savior, and exchanged Him for something and someone else. That is the charge against the Galatians, and it is an obviously serious one. Phillips version reads, “you have so quickly transferred your allegiance from Him.”

We are speaking here of a commitment to, and reliance upon, the Lord Jesus. When they were baptized into Christ, they had given their allegiance to Christ Himself, and commenced living for Him. They relied on Him for the resources required to serve the Lord and keep themselves pure. But now, they had changed that allegiance to something else. Paul does not say that their devotion had simply cooled, but traces the reason of their defection to its immediate cause – they had given themselves to something else. In so doing, they had deserted God, abandoned Him, left Him, and removed themselves from Him. They had deliberately moved from God the Father to something else. They had turned renegade against Him, turned away from Him, and taken their loyalty away from Him. That is the meaning of this expression.

This is what the letter to the Hebrews calls “departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12), and “drawing back” (Heb 10:38). David would call it “wickedly departing from my God” (Psa 18:21). Isaiah refers to it as “removing their heart far from” God (Isa 29:13).

This departure was not an obvious return to the world, and to fleshly indulgences. The Galatians had maintained a religious form, kept their

churches visibly intact, and continued to wear the name of the Lord and profess allegiance to Him. However, they had, in fact, abandoned the Lord, and were now depending on other resources to maintain their religious lives. They did not know what they had done, for sin so dulls the mind that a proper assessment of one's condition becomes impossible. However, Paul knew, and spoke about it.

1:6b “. . . that called you into the grace of Christ . . .” Keep in mind, this is speaking of abandoning God Himself – the One who “called” us. It is He that has called us “to be saints” (Rom 1:7), called us “unto the fellowship of His Son” (1 Cor 1:9). He has “called us unto holiness” (1 Thess 4:7), “called us with a holy calling” (2 Tim 1:9), and “called us unto His eternal glory” (1 Pet 5:10). He has called us “unto His kingdom and glory,” (1 Thess 2:12), and “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

Here all of those marvelous objectives are summarized in the expression “into the grace of Christ.” He is the locus where all of those marvelous benefits are commenced and maintained. None of them – not a single one of them – can possibly be realized outside of Christ Jesus. I mean, outside of a fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and abiding in Christ (John 15:4,7). It involves remaining where we have been seated together with Him “in heavenly places” (Eph 1:6). Concerning the ones whom God has effectively called, He has given them over to Christ (John 6:39; 8:37; Heb 2:13). The call of God, and everything associated with it – fellowship, holiness, eternal glory, and His kingdom – can ONLY be realized in Christ. Furthermore, the throne upon which Jesus is seated is appropriately called, “the throne of grace” (Heb 4:16).

Concerning its prophesied regal nature, that throne is "the throne of David" (Isa 9:7; Acts 2:30).

God has "called us" into an economy of grace that is being administered exclusively by the Lord Jesus Christ. It is therefore referred to as "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 15:11; Rom 16:20,24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 8:9; 13:14; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; Phil 1:25; Rev 22:21). It is declared that this grace is "exceeding abundant with faith and love" (1 Tim 1:14), which cannot possibly be realized in another location.

It is not possible to present a proper depiction of Jesus Christ without making known the grace that He is administering. That is the same grace that is also referred to as "the grace of God" – an expression that is used twenty-three times in Scripture (Lk 2:40; Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 15:40; Acts 20:24; Rom 5:15; 1 Cor 1:4; 3:10; 15:10; 2 Cor 1:12; 6:1; 8:1; 9:14; Gal 2:21; Eph 3:2,7; Col 1:6; Tit 2:11; Heb 2:9; 12:25; 1 Pet 4:10; 5:12).

Let it be clear what Paul is saying. In removing themselves from God, they had moved themselves from Jesus Christ, and from the grace He is administering. In turning their attention to something else, they had turned their gaze away from the Lord – the very gaze through which we are "changed from glory unto glory" (2 Cor 3:18). A person cannot turn away from God without turning away from everything pertaining to life and godliness. When God is forfeited, all of the benefits He gives are also forfeited. I understand that this is jarring to certain ways of thinking in the Christian community, but it must be said anyway, for it is the truth. It is inconceivable that Paul would write in this manner if what had taken place in Galatia was not spiritually catastrophic.

God "called us into the grace of Christ" – into the grace that comes "from the Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 1:2). Being called into that grace involves the awareness of it, dependence upon it, and the realization, of the benefits brought by it. I do not know that any person can support the notion that grace continues to sustain and fortify those who know nothing about it. That is precisely why so very much is said about grace in the epistles (114 times), bringing a kind of spiritual intelligence to the people.

Now, with all of that in mind, ponder the assessment Paul has made of the Galatian churches: "I am surprised and astonished that you are so quickly turning renegade and deserting Him Who invited and called you by the grace (unmerited favor) of Christ (the Messiah)." **AMPLIFIED** Is there anything casual about his words? Is it even possible to think of them as nothing more than an opinion? How serious is it to remove oneself from God, to desert Him, leave Him, or forsake Him? What would lead any person to think such a thing is incidental, or that it has no impact upon how God views a person.

It is no wonder that Paul was stunned by the defection of the Galatians. Think what had been accomplished by God in their conversion. They had been quickened, or made alive (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13), raised up and made to sit together with Christ (Eph 2:6), and reconciled to God (Col 1:21). They had been forgiven of all their trespasses (Col 2:13), made accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6), and washed (1 Cor 6:11). They had been delivered from the condemning Law (Rom 7:6), delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God's Son (Col 1:13). They were given access to God and His grace through Christ (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12), and were

enabled to approach the throne of God with boldness (Heb 4:16). Yet, with all of those advantages, common to every person who is in Christ, they had abandoned God, forsaken Him, and deserted Him. Just how serious is something like that?

1:6c “. . . unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.”

Paul now identifies what has been embraced by the Galatians. While the particulars are not specified, the effects of abandoning God to embrace something or someone else is known by the results that it produces.

ANOTHER GOSPEL. Other versions read, “a different gospel,” ^{NKJV} and “a different [even an opposition] gospel.” ^{AMPLIFIED} The defection of the Galatians had not been to a life of immorality, where all restraints are thrown off, and uncontrolled profligacy is indulged freely. He is not speaking of leaving God for drunkenness, fornication, or some other form of outward immoral indulgence. We are plainly told that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5).

Here, Paul speaks of leaving God for “another Gospel,” or a “different gospel.” It is a core message that is at variance with the Gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16). It is a powerless gospel that cannot effect a change in the people. It is a message through which God does not, and will not, work. It is a different kind of gospel, established on different kinds of principles, and offering differing kinds of benefits. It is a gospel in which the primary note of grace cannot be heard. It is a gospel in which Jesus Christ Himself is neither prominent

nor necessary.

How is it possible to read something like this and deduce that the message that is being preached is of little consequence – that men have been given the liberty to develop their own message, which is designed to meet what they perceive to be the needs of the people? Paul also charged the Corinthians with receiving and adhering to “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4).

“Another gospel” is supposedly good news, or glad tidings. This text is not speaking of “another law,” or “another commandment.” It is speaking of a core message of hope that is false to its essence. It is a word that offers hope, but cannot deliver what it promises.

WHICH IS NOT ANOTHER. Just as surely as there are only one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all (Eph 4:4-6), so there is only one Gospel. That is, there is only one liberating word, one message that is good news indeed, and one word of glad tidings that factually announces what is available to men and how they can be blessed. The Gospel of the Kingdom is not that you can be rich, or have the things you desire in this world, or realize your dreams for this world. It is not that you can have a happy home, or be successful in your occupation, or be free from disease and trouble while tabernacling in the flesh. It is not that you can be a better man or woman, or secret ways to come into Divine favor. Those are not gospel. They are “different” – of a differing order. God has not authored them, and grace is not in them. Any claims that they have helped people are fabrications, and are not the truth.

To say it another way, you have to desert God Himself, and thrust the Gospel from you, to believe these

false gospels. Even if a kind of innocence attends the embrace of these gospels, the true gospel is still forfeited. Neither the heart nor the mind can contain the lie and the truth at the same time. They cannot coexist, or be in harmony, in the individual.

TROUBLING INFLUENCES. Those who deliver these other gospels are actually troubling the people – agitating the waters of life. Other versions read, “disturb you,” ^{NASB} “throwing you into confusion,” ^{NIV} and “confusing you.” That is, they are making it more difficult to believe, and are putting a distance between the people and the promises of God. Jesus preaches peace (Eph 2:17), but they preach confusion. The notes of their message are discordant, and do not harmonize with the Gospel of Christ.

Maybe the state of the modern church has been caused by the message it is hearing. Those who major on problem resolution have really only increased the problems. The difficulties they profess to be addressing are not going away.

PERVERTING THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Other versions read, “distort,” ^{NASB} “make changes,” ^{BBE} “twist,” ^{NLT} and “turn the good news upside down.” ^{WILLIAMS} The word “pervert” means to “corrupt,” ^{THAYER} “turn into something else,” ^{FRIBERG} and “to cause a change of state, with emphasis upon the difference in the resulting state.” ^{LOUW/NIDA} This is not something the perpetrators actually do, but what they “would” do – “want” ^{NASB} to do, or “trying to” do, ^{NIV} or “desiring to make.” ^{BBE} Peter refers to this as wresting, or twisting, the Scriptures, affirming that they bring destruction upon themselves by doing so (2 Pet 3:16).

Today, the church is being exceedingly troubled by false messages. The pace of this trouble is increasing exponentially with all manner of erroneous emphases being hurled at the people. In view of this text of Scripture, no believer can afford to approach this condition casually.

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CARNALLY MINDED OR SPIRITUALLY MINDED

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:5-6).

Considering what is written concerning the flesh and the Spirit, one would think there would be a driving compulsion among professed believers to be spiritually intelligent on such matters, and to exercise themselves to walk in, and live after the Spirit.

Also, it makes sense that any professing believer would obtain an adequate knowledge of what it meant to walk after the flesh, and to zealously avoid doing so. That is, if the Word of God is to be believed, we should expect this mindset in the church.

However, this is not the case within the nominal church. Disinterest in such things reveals a certain alien-

ation from God that can be neither justified nor defended.

Think, for example, what is said concerning walking after and minding the things of the flesh.

1. *"For to be carnally minded is death . . ."* (Rom 8:6)
2. *"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be"* (Rom 8:7).
3. *"So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God"* (Rom 8:8).
4. *"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die. . ."* (Rom 8:13).
5. *"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh . . ."* (Rom 8:1).
6. *"They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts"* (Gal 5:24).