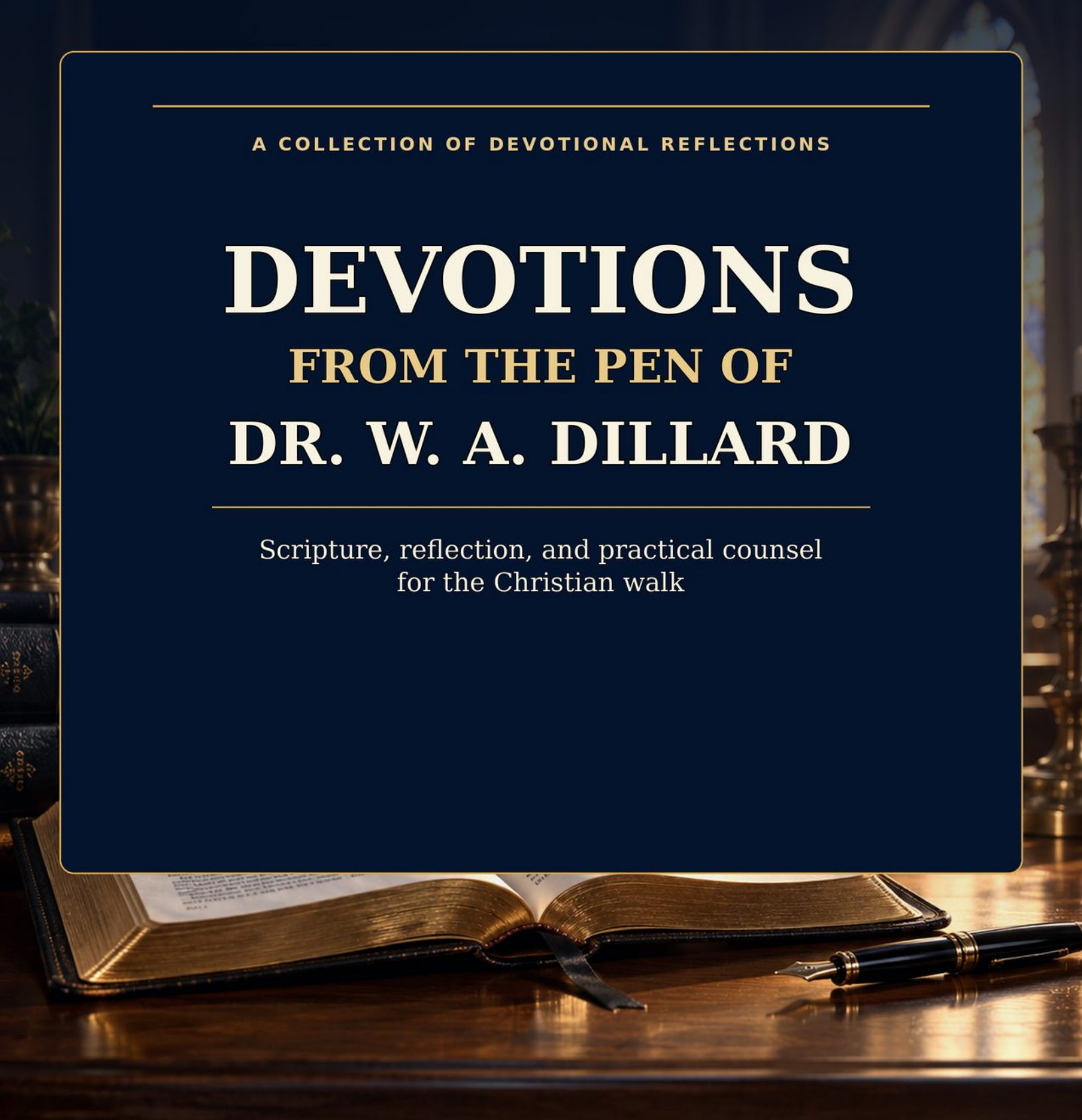

A COLLECTION OF DEVOTIONAL REFLECTIONS

DEVOTIONS

FROM THE PEN OF

DR. W. A. DILLARD

Scripture, reflection, and practical counsel
for the Christian walk



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A HOLE IN YOUR BUCKET???

"Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes." Haggai 1:5,6.

The scripture reference is addressed to God's covenant people who had deserted the house of God and His ways in favor of materialism. However, rereading the verse today causes one to see the ills of the modern world, especially America, but the Lord's churches in particular. As church attendance continues to decline, dissatisfaction in material things mounts as they fail. More material things satisfies less while such demands continue to increase. To be sure, there are holes in the bucket of those who prefer material things to the fellowship of God and His cause.

But to be precise in what is conveyed here, industriousness is not cast in a negative light, only its misuse. There is a considerable amount of negative, even outright condemnatory statements in the Holy Word about the lazy, sluggard, and "will not work" attitude. On the other hand, Solomon said, *"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."* Ecc. 9:10. What God has given to each one in life by which life is sustained and material things provided, should by all means be used skillfully. The sin is in the misuse of time and talents for selfish consumption.

Wise ones will remember that it is God who gives life, health, strength, opportunities for advancement, etc. To forsake Him and His cause for what must soon be left behind forever is nothing short of idiocy run amuck! Do you work hard, but can't make ends meet? Do you worry about your daily needs? Listen to Jesus. *"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things." But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.*" Matt. 6:31-33. Isn't it time to plug the holes in your bucket?

FOR THOUGHT: Is there a hole in the bucket of your life? Are you tired of seeing expectations disappear through that hole? How are you going to plug the hole? God does not desire any of His people to be lazy, but all should be industrious while trusting and serving. Please read the last paragraph of this article again.

A KISS FOR A KEY

"All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss." I Corinthians 16:20.

Several decades ago, I was traveling from the college in Oklahoma to Northeast Oklahoma to represent it in a meeting. My good friend and fellow worker, the late James Croswell was with me as he was on many occasions. It was late evening as we made our way through Tulsa. It was pouring down rain, and we were both hungry.

Finding a Casa Bonita in a shopping center, we pulled off the Interstate Highway to eat. But, the rain kept pelting down. We decided to make a run for the shelter of the restaurant, so we quickly exited the car and ran. As we finished our delicious dinner, I picked up the ticket and reached for my wallet which had been locked in the car along with the car keys. James did not have his wallet either, so what to do?

The cashier agreed that my face was at least half-way honest, and agreed to wait for payment until I could retrieve my wallet. In this rain, a locksmith was out of the question, but what to do? It was then that a revival a year earlier came to mind. The pastor, Charles Beam had been studying to be a locksmith, and he made an extra key and taped it to the heater hose of my car. I hoped it was still there. In those days the hood could be released from the outside, but the incessant rain . . . I did not bring a change of clothes. What to do?

Outside, two little aged ladies came down the sidewalk with a large umbrella. I was desperate, so I asked if I could please borrow their umbrella for three minutes to retrieve the key to my car? I don't know if I scared them, or if they were touched by my plight, but they agreed. Opening the hood of my car, I breathed an audible "Thank you" as that key was spotted. In a flash, it was retrieved, the car door unlocked, my wallet retrieved, and the umbrella returned to the kind ladies who were amused at it all by this time.

Oh, no! The story does not end here. A few weeks later, a statewide meeting of the churches in Oklahoma found me and that locksmith pastor in close proximity. Without my mentioning to him what had happened, I raced up and kissed him on the cheek. I thought he would faint as he sputtered at an attempt to ask what in the world was going on! As I explained the story to him, we both had a great laugh, and he laughingly swore he would be most careful for whom he made the next key!

The fellowship among the brethren was precious in those days, as it was in most places outside Arkansas. It is not that the fellowship is bad in Arkansas, rather it is so much less. Preachers would go a long way in other states to visit a fellow minister for a few hours, and many still do. However in Arkansas, most preachers cannot be found very quickly, and a large portion of them are not interested in interrupting their plans for the day to spend some hours with one from out of town. This is not meant to be mean, just so! Soon the day is coming when all things will be sublimated to the joy of the presence of one another in the Lord, and what a day that will be!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you treasure the company of fellow believers? It is an evidence of the presence of salvation according to the epistle of John. Do you know that one day believers will be privileged to sit down in the kingdom with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?

A MILLION \$ FOR YOUR THOUGHTS!

Wow! Inflation is worse than figured! Not long ago it was a penny for your thoughts! So how could thoughts be worth a million dollars? First, thoughts have to be forwarded into action, so, think with me and I will show you how it can happen.

I have asked several groups of people if they knew the exacted price from those who run over a chicken in Germany. None knew. The answer is: the guilty party not only pays for the chicken, but also for all the eggs it may have laid over its lifetime. That is considered the value of the chicken. This principle applies across the board of life.

When anyone places a dollar in the offering plates at church, he not only gives up the dollar, but also the interest it would have earned over his lifetime. That is the value of a dollar. So suppose one tithes his income, or more, for a lifetime. Also consider that each dollar given might have earned an average of six percent annually over his years. If those tithes are \$50, \$100, \$200 per week, and that was begun in early to midlife, just do the math. It becomes astronomical. Now consider that Jesus said that whatever one gives up (houses, lands, etc.) he will receive a hundredfold, Matt 19:29. Now multiply your astronomical number by 100. The world has never offered such an investment return, and material things even as fine as His, are the very least of the Lord's offerings.

Two things must combine here: first, one's heart, then his treasure. Jesus taught us that where one's treasure is, there will his heart be also, Luke 12:34. Some complain that they cannot afford to give such amounts. That indicates a heart problem. Everyone must remember that the gold and silver; the cattle of a thousand hills; yes, the earth itself, and all therein; the money, too, belongs to the Lord, Psm. 50:10, 24:1, Hag. 2:8, I Cor. 10:26. He who demanded the tithe under the Mosaic Law provides opportunity for us all under grace to exceed that in church support, benevolence, mission work, and reaching out to others in need. Such are opportunities rather than obligations, and the cheerful giver who seizes upon them is indeed wise. He is accumulating great treasure in heaven which is both secure and eternal. Put into proper action a million dollars may be a pittance for your thoughts!

FOR THOUGHT: So does a million dollars for your thoughts make you a millionaire? Please consider that a millionaire may be a pauper compared to the value of eternal things one may have as the result of a life well lived for the Lord Jesus Christ. Are you doing this?

A PENNY, NO, A FORTUNE FOR YOUR THOUGHTS

The annals of history provide peepholes into the spectrum of man's environment from his best to his worst. Most encouraging are those that show spiritual and moral triumph under adverse conditions. Such was the case in the days of the prophet Malachi. His generation would be the last to have the comfort of communication from God, embarking upon the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testaments.

So soon had the Jewish society forgotten the lesson of Babylonian captivity. Their conduct toward God, and toward one another was atrocious and despicable. In that day, and through the last of Old Testament spokesmen, God sent a strong message of great clarity. He began by reaffirming His great love for the sons of Jacob. Next He points out the great sins of the nation in their disrespect for God, His Word, and His service, including their dog eat dog relationships with one another. It is so applicable to society today, but God is to be praised that it does not permeate His true churches as it has religion in general.

Through Malachi, God gave prophetic promises of great comfort to those who had ears to hear. God's messenger would visit His people. Elijah (John the Baptist) would return to set the hearts of children to their parents and parents to their children.

It was then that “. . . *they that feared the Lord often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.*” 3:16-17.

Let us all learn that training our thoughts on the Lord and His Word is profitable for life here and now. Additionally, it is nothing short of the pathway to eternal riches. It is written in Jeremiah 29:11, “*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end,*”

A penny for your thoughts? No, no! Cheapskate! God says, properly directed, they are worth a fortune, eternally!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you know that your thoughts have great value? They are leading you to pursue righteousness or they are leading you into destruction. Either way, they are powerful. Since each person may control his thoughts (note Philippians 4:8), what are you doing with your thoughts? What do you choose to think about?

A QUESTION OF WALLS

“ . . . and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: . . . And had a wall great and high, . . . ” Revelation 21:10-12.

Much is heard these days regarding a wall, particularly along the southern border of the United States and Mexico. It is a politically hot topic fraught with side issues that separate Democratic/Republican parties specifically, and conservative, progressive liberals in the general population. The flood of people migrating into the USA are in sufficient numbers to threaten the stability of the county. Illegal drugs flowing through that southern border wreak havoc on a large segment of people who are willing to drop out of productivity and become dependent on an ever shrinking workforce.

At issue over the proposed walled border is whether or not such a wall would work. Some say the very idea of a wall is archaic and reeks of medieval times. Others say differently. The crux of the matter of a wall is not whether it will work. In reality, walls by their very nature are not active. Walls either are, or they are not. They stand or they are broken down. So if there is a wall, it is not active, but static, and its very presence fulfills the purpose of containment/restraint/defense.

It is interesting to note that the word “Wall” is used in the Bible well over 200 times. Most usages are literal, but several are metaphorical. One of the most impressive is revealed in the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea in their exodus from Egypt. Entrapped by a pursuing Egyptian army, there was no place to go but into the sea. However, God created an intangible wall between the Egyptians and the Hebrews; a wall of darkness to the Egyptians that was a wall of light to the Hebrews. Then He caused a strong wind to create a wide swath of dry land through the breath of the sea. The water was a wall on their left hand and their right hand, allowing them to cross over dry shod. Exodus 14:29

Additionally, walls about ancient cities were sufficient to intimidate the Hebrews from entering the Promised Land. Num. 13:28. Jerusalem was built with massive walls about it, and their reconstruction under the prophet Nehemiah caused considerable political problems, but God allowed it to happen. In fact, a city of any size without walls was almost inconceivable, and its possibility gave force to proverbs. Solomon said, *“He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.”* Prov. 25:28.

It is also interesting to note that in the final heaven age the glory bride of the Lord will live in New Jerusalem, the magnificent city of gold and precious gems, which will also be a city with massive walls. Rev. 21. Common sense dictates that if walls fulfilled their purpose then, it really is hard to argue that they fail to fulfill their purpose now. But, these days, common sense is not so common. I like walls! they enhance control, defense, and containment.

FOR THOUGHT: Think of some walls that are most effective. Now think of some walls that are bad such as social walls people build between themselves. How do you feel about these walls?

A SUPPOSED CONTRADICTION

To some, there is a contradiction in scriptures from the content of Genesis 2:4, 4:26, and Exodus 6:3. A close look at those contents will cause the supposed contradiction to dissipate. God emphasized to Moses that His name is Jehovah in Exodus 6:3. He went on to say, *"And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them."* Exodus 6:2-3.

Now, consider that God introduced this name as a compound with Elohim in Genesis 2:4 where it appears in Hebrew as "Jehovah-elohim" "LORD God". Now, fast forward to Genesis 4:26, *"And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD."* "LORD" in all caps in English Bibles distinguishes it as the Hebrew word "Jehovah."

"Ah-ha" says the skeptic. There it is a clear contradiction." No, not so fast, for the following reasons: 1) the name "Jehovah" has specific revelatory connotations and denotations. Those connotations...and... denotations associated with that name expose the God Who progressively reveals Himself to His people, and they were about to take on graphic meaning in the contest with Egypt's gods; indeed, in the entire episodes of the exodus, wilderness wanderings of Israel, and conquest of the Promised Land. No one had previously seen or dared to imagine the seemingly endless string of miraculous displays of power by God, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as He revealed Himself as Jehovah to the Hebrew nation. 2) The term "know or known" must be understood. Sometimes in the Bible that term may indicate a conjugal relationship between a man and his wife, or illicitly between an unwed couple. In some contexts, it indicates an approved or disapproved relationship in human and spiritual affairs (as the case may be) yet in other contexts, it means to thoroughly know and understand certain bits of knowledge, or negatively to fail to understand. It is in this last definition that application beckons. While men may have called upon the name of Jehovah as early as Genesis 4:26, there simply was no understanding in their minds of the proper associations indigenous to that name. Those were reserved for the exodus: a special benefit to the Hebrews, and to us upon whom the ends of the world have come.

Finally, the context of Exodus 6:3 refers to its antecedents Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; not to those antediluvians who lived one millennium or more before those patriarchs. It is clear that the conditions of the antediluvian world were such as would hasten the discard of any significant bits of knowledge about God from those very early days of Genesis 4.

So where is the supposed contradiction? It is just that, a supposed one which must fall in the light of correlated truth from the infallible Word of God.

FOR THOUGHT: Now do you appreciate the task of proper, but different translations of the same word according to the context in which it is used? Do you see that such various usages have precedent within the bible itself, as well as in everyday life? What are some words common to your vocabulary that mean different things in different contexts?

AIDS OF THE AGE(D)

Death was introduced to, and inducted into the human species at its fountain head in Eden. English translations of Holy Writ convey death first as "*Surely die*" (Gen. 2:17). It was the penalty of eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The ancient language uses participial action, and literally translated, it reads "*Dying, thou shalt die.*" This conveyance is proper, denoting death as a working process that culminates in removal from the earth, and ultimately eternal death in hell (conscious existence apart from the Creator and His blessings). So it was then; so it is now.

Length of days has varied over the vicissitudes of time, but aging (dying) always continued. At the molecular level science shows that billions of body cells die, and are replaced every cycle of seven years. As they reproduce themselves each ensuing one is affected by free radicals, making it less perfect; hence, the aging (dying) process.

It is this very process which Solomon so eloquently wrote about in Ecc. 12. It is noted as a failure in delight; vision diminished; gloominess and depression increased; teeth (grinders) become few; bending down becomes burdensome and painful; fear of falling and of heights generally dominate; even the grasshopper becomes a burden. Sleeplessness prevails, and the end of it all is the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl broken. It is then that the dust (body) shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit of man will return to God Who gave it. It is a predictable process which cannot be stopped as long as people are in the natural, sinful state of life. Medical science is indeed vaunted in the 21st Century, but it has neither improved upon, nor negated the truth of Psalm 90:10.

However, the progress of man, blessed of God, allows the aged of the age to live a more palatial life. Aids are indeed a blessing from God! No, not the disease, but the devices. Happy indeed are many of us who are the beneficiaries of them all. We have CPAP machines that allow us to get six to seven hours of sleep most every night, maintaining a level of health for productivity to continue. Furthermore, we are blessed with the aid of glasses to correct vision to 20/20, and now the removal of cataracts which allows good vision without glasses. Additionally, hearing aids allow fuller interaction in conversation. With them, it is amazing what one hears, but some things not heard would be a blessing, too.

With all the aids of the age(d), life continues in a largely unabated force, but the cellular breakdown continues, and soon we must all go the way of all the earth. The good news is that there is a marvelous light at the end of that tunnel of death for those who know the Lord Jesus Christ personally. It is none other than Him Who welcomes us into the eternal realm where life is always at its zenith, and aids do not exist. Who could entertain missing that future?

FOR THOUGHT: If you are not now blessed with the aids of the aged, hang on, you will be in time. Aside from these blessings, do you realize that you are, in fact, in the process of dying? Do you know there is something better than an aid for that? It is replacement of death with the fullness of life in Christ. Have you crowned Him king in the throne room of your heart?

AIN'T GONNA STUDY WAR NO MORE!

Some noted person has said, "War is hell!" Of course, it isn't but it may be as close to it as one will encounter in earthly life. War! It is the story of evil versus good. The very first war was fought in heaven between the aggressive insurrection of Lucifer and the righteous forces of the Creator. The very last war will also pit these forces at the end of the millennium. In the ensuing millenniums between, it has been wars, wars, and rumors of wars! Think about it!

The Old Testament is cocked full of accounts of war. From the war of Abraham against five confederated kings to the conquest of the Promised Land, and the countless wars against God's people once they were settled in the Promised Land. The history of mankind is written in red, blood red with wars and more wars!

Through these wars, forced by evil, God's plan with man persevered to its predestined goal. Sinful men made righteous by the once-for-offering of God's Lamb received the fullness of heaven's instructions; followed them as the ultimate spiritual guide, and finally were in the position of mature sons in the spiritual realm.

But it would not be their lot to avoid war either. But, the warfare of the church is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places, Eph. 6:12. Moreover, it would be a personal warfare deep within each disciple as the flesh wars against the spirit and vice versa. Rom. 7.

The genre was set in the very first war after the Hebrews were liberated from Egypt, and the Amalekites brought battle to them. God instructed Moses to put this in the book for, said He, there will war with Amalek (the flesh) perpetually from generation to generation. 2 Corinthians 10:4 teaches us "*(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)*" Thus did Paul admonish Timothy to ". . . war a good warfare" 1 Tim. 1:18

In the war of influence, the church is being marginalized. It is foretold! Of antichrist it is said that it was given to him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them. Dan. 7:21; Rev. 13:7. But that is not the last chapter. God's people will be the final victors in Christ, and our Promised Land will be so much more than a land flowing with milk and honey . . . forever! Rev. 22. At last, we will study war no more!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you see that the conflict of the ages is the conflict of sin vs righteousness? Where is that conflict carried out if not in the life of every person who accepts Christ Jesus as his personal Savior? Do you have such conflict in your life? Please know that such conflicts handled well through the grace of God has rich, eternal reward.

ANCIENT LESSONS FOR MODERN TIMES

In the heat of political races, many become distraught and feel there is no way out of the gloom and doom drumbeat of a Christ-denying world. Perhaps all who experience such frustration and depressing prospects would do well to become better acquainted with the hope of Holy Writ. I write specifically of ancient lessons for modern times.

God is the author of the family, human government, and His church: the three most important institutions on earth. He put design in each of them as well as in all of them combined. Moreover, a predetermined end for them, as well as all things, was set long ago, and will not be deterred. Think about it!

Ancient Nebuchadnezzar ruled the first human empire. The hanging gardens of the magnificent city of Babylon remain one of the wonders of the ancient world. But the king was lifted up in pride, and took credit for building the empire himself. It was then that God allowed him to be driven from men; to run with the beast of the field until he learned that the Most High God ruled in the governments of men, and brought to power whom He would. Nothing about that principle has changed.

The empires of Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome rose and fell right on schedule. Quite soon, the stone cut out without hands will smite the human empire, fill the earth, and rule in righteousness even as ancient Daniel saw it in a vision from God.

Furthermore, the last chapter of Holy Writ is still just as true as the first chapter was and is. Then let the people of God rejoice. These things that are happening should evoke the uplook of life. Let every head and heart of faith be looking up for redemption draweth nigh, and there is no power in the universe to stop it, delay it, or thwart it to an alternate purpose. Thus "on Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand!" God still appeals to His people as He did through Jeremiah 6:16, *"Thus saith the Lord, . . . ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls."*

FOR THOUGHT: Could there be a more appropriate time to seek wise ways in life than today? When you do all you can do to honor God and live safely, do you find comfort in trusting God to do for you what you cannot do for yourself? What do you think of ancient lessons mentioned here, and their application to modern times?

AND THEN SHALL COME THE END

“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come.” Joel 2:28-31.

From the halls of history echo the profound words of the prophet Joel, who spoke of the “Landmarks” of the church age. Hundreds of years later the apostle Peter, inspired by the same Holy Spirit that rested upon Joel took up these very words, quoting him thus, *“ But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and notable day of the Lord come:” Acts 2:16-20.*

The markers of the church age which Joel spoke and Peter quoted are of the entire age. The indicators are given for both the beginning and the ending of the age. The former signs were accomplished at Pentecost. The latter signs involving the sun, moon, stars, etc. have not been seen as yet, but will mark the close of the age. This is verified in Revelation Chapter Six at the opening of the sixth seal. The apostle John wrote: *“And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Rev. 6:12-14.*

In dealing with prophecy, one must be alert to the fact that often great spans of time are covered in a few words without any indicators of a time break. One must be well versed in the scriptures to *“rightly divide the word of truth.”* 2 Tim 2:15. Then comparing scripture with scripture one finds the unity and harmony of the entire Word. Such coalescing of the precious Word of God brings unparalleled joy to the Bible student. It is nothing short of what Solomon described in Proverbs 25:2, *“It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.”* If your joy has not been full, it just may be that you are not searching out the things of God that will give you both wisdom and great joy! Divide it correctly!

FOR THOUGHT: Have you considered that one of Jesus' harsh criticism of religious hypocrites was their failure to discern the time of their visitation? Matt. 16:3, Luke 12:56. Paul told the Thessalonians that God's people are not children of the night that that day should overtake them as a thief. Are you watching and discerning the time of the end of the age?

ANOTHER FOREMAN'S FABLE

"Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me." John 21:22

The appearances and effects of sin in human life are myriad. In fact, Every bad thing in the universe of mankind is attributable directly or indirectly to sin. This is apparent in domestic disputes and their ultimate fruitions. Such is also the cause of unkind words and deeds directed toward brethren of the same faith and practice. (Biting and devouring is how the Bible puts it.)

Addressing this issue in another of his classes: Ministerial Practicalities, Dr. L. D. Foreman, former President of Missionary Baptist Seminary in Little Rock, Arkansas shared yet another of his well thought out and grounded fables for his students to seriously consider. He said, "Students, all of you have witnessed a big dog trotting down the street. The dog has a destination in mind and continues steadily toward it. However, as he progresses down the street, every little dog on the block will come out to bark at him. Now if the big dog is distracted enough to stop and bark back at every little dog that barks at him, he will never reach his destination. Consequently, he ignores the little dogs, and their barking, and continues his journey."

Foreman went on to make practical applications which by this time had become obvious. Any devoted follower of Jesus will not be treated better than Jesus in His ministry. He will be controversial on the basis of Bible convictions, and he will attract the attention of a number of "little dogs" who come out to bark. Like the literal big dog, the minister must know who he is, what he is about, and where he is going. With those things settled in place, it is very unwise to stop and bark back at those who cast objections, however frivolous those objections may be. The object is not to debate one another, but to serve the Master by carrying out his holy Will for your life.

Of course, it remains that there are those whose thrill of life, and apparent calling (not of God) is to object to everything, however holy, that may rub against their self-imposed comfort zone. Because this is true, one must determine early on to be on a mission, or to bark at everyone else who is.

FOR THOUGHT: How does Foreman's fable apply to your life? Is not the principle applicable to everyone who seeks to be productive?

ANSWER; DO NOT ANSWER

There are times when those who search the Holy Word with evil intent find an apparent example of their wish to discredit it. One such instance is found in Proverbs 26:4-5: *"Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit."* Thinking to have found that elusive contradiction, they delight in becoming as the subject of those verses: a fool. Let's think about it!

In such instances when literal words appear contradictory, the idea being conveyed depends heavily upon the all important context. The nuance of any language allows the same terms to be used contextually to convey quite different ideas. A parent finalizing warnings to a child before exercising imminent punishment might say, "Do that just one more time!" Of course the idea quickly understood is "You had better not do that one more time." Here, the import of the message is quickly understood by inflection of voice and/or body language, both of which are absent in the written word, underscoring even more the importance of context (that which is to be read or understood as being with the text). If this is making the reader a little tired, hang on because now we are ready to deal with the specific verses of scripture at hand. Proverbs 26:4 is understood to convey this meaning: Do not answer, or even pretend to be in agreement with the frivolous comments of a close-minded fool placating him in his folly, lest you will be like him. The next verse, 26:5 conveys the proper interaction with one who is a fool. Answer, setting forth corrections to the erroneous statements of a fool according to his folly, otherwise he will be wise in his own eyes, believing you agree with him.

These verses of scripture, far from being contradictory are complementary in detailing proper interactions that are sure to become a part of everyone's experience. Truth cannot contradict itself, and remain. Two plus two equals four. and is an unerring truth. If at any time the formula allows a different (contradictory) product, it has fallen from truth to become a lie.

The concept under consideration here is often hard for some to employ, being sensitive to the feelings of others. But one must be true to the truth and wisdom given him from above or become the enablement to a lie. Men would do well to recall the words of Solomon as he said. *"Open rebuke is better than secret love,"*(Prov. 27:5), and *"Faithful are the wounds of a friend . . ."* Proverbs. 27:6. Thus, in wise discernment one does well to answer or to not answer.

FOR THOUGHT: How many times have you answered someone, then later wished you had answered differently? Does this not underscore the need to be especially thoughtful in answering a fool or an antagonist person? Such is the employment of wisdom.

ANTICHRIST IS HERE!!

Our dearly beloved apostle, John wrote: *"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."* 1 John 2:18. Now, hold on just a minute! What is he saying? What does he mean? Think with me!

Since *"...man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God."* Luke 4:4, it is imperative that every word of God be thoroughly understood to achieve correct theology and proper discipleship. Therefore we understand that "antichrist" is a compound word. "Anti" is a prefix meaning "against," "Opposite," "In the negative." "Anti" in this case does not necessitate harshness, but simply a mild twisting of the truth into error, and propagating it as truth. Moreover, "Christ" is a Greek term transliterated into English. It means "anointed." So, the apostle John is telling us that there are many who are anti-(the)anointed in the world already in his time. Of course, that number has been multiplied exponentially over the last two thousand years.

Now a proper application of the compound term that is totally in harmony with all the rest of the Word of God must be understood. Greeks would use the term "Christ" while Hebrews would use the term "Messiah." Hence, the meaning of these terms go deep into Hebrew history. The anointing of a new king or high priest was accomplished with a public ceremony wherein oil was poured over the head of the designated person. Oil is consistently symbolic of the Holy Spirit. Upon the anointing, the Holy Spirit empowered the anointed one with sufficient wisdom and power to properly fulfill the office for which he was being installed.

In the New Testament, only two entities were anointed with the Holy Spirit, imparting to them the power to fulfill their designated role. Those two are the head of the body and the body of the head. Specifically, these are Jesus, the head of His body, the church, at His baptism and His body, the church, on the day of Pentecost, Acts 2. The Head of the body, and the body of the Head stand for the same principles. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life while the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and it is the propagator of the faith once delivered to the saints by and through the Head.

Finally, if every word of God is important, and true (which it is), and if the anointed body of Jesus is heaven's agency on earth standing for, and propagating that word of truth, then it follows that every institution and person on earth seeking to pervert, deny, and twist that word of truth out of its context to make it seem to say something it does not, is indeed antichrist. Indeed many antichrists are here, and they will play a significant role in propelling THE COMING MAN OF SIN into international prominence. Therefore while it is today, call on the name of the Lord in repentance from sin, placing faith in Christ instead of one of the many antichrists.

FOR THOUGHT: Does this article promote different ideas of antichrist in your mind? If not, why not? If so, what have you done, or what are you going to do to correctly position yourself in the will of God? What you accept as truth, and what you do with it matters.

AS WITH PHARAOH, SO NOW!

Students of Hebrew grammar soon discover a number of joyous gems of truth in the scriptures that otherwise lie mostly hidden. No, these discoveries are not earth shattering, certainly not contradictory to the JKV English edition, but enlightening.

Consider the incidents in Egypt as Moses repeatedly asked Pharaoh to let the Hebrews go. In Exodus 5:1, 7:16, 8:1, 8:20, 21; 9:1,13; 10:3, 4. The request or demand is repeatedly made, "Let my people go." In those instances in which Pharaoh initially agreed, he changed his mind when the plague was removed, one wonders why he was so adamant in his refusal. The answer, of course, lies in Exodus 10:1. God told Moses, *"For I have hardened his heart, and the heart of his servants, that I might shew these my signs before him."* So, God hardened his heart.

Now, enter information from Hebrew grammar. In parsing the stems of a Hebrew verb varying degrees of intensity are conveyed: simple, intensive, causative, reflexive. Take a verb as "Kill" This would be read: "He killed" (simple); "He killed, poisoned, shot, and crushed" (intensive); "He caused to kill" (causative). "He killed himself" (reflexive). Since most folks have forgotten their exposure to grammar, the point will be no longer labored, but concluded. The verb "hardened" referencing the heart of Pharaoh is in the intensive degree and may be understood to mean God made adamant, turned to stone reinforced with steel, so that no other option was then exercisable. God would get glory from Pharaoh and His servants in this manner.

A similar matter is related in Deuteronomy 2:30 as Moses spoke of *"Sihon, king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day."*

Understanding how God dealt with the forces of evil in men in history gives one insight as to how he may deal with them again in the future, as they more adamantly reject truth in the end of this age.

It is to this that the Apostle Paul pens the sobering information about those who receive not the love of the truth as recorded in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12, *"And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.."*

When God sends obstinacy or delusion, there is no turning from it. With the exception of tiny pockets of New Covenant believers here and there, the world does not hear, nor does it want to hear the truth of God's Word. Could it be that we are seeing people under that strong delusion already? If so, the time of great revivals is over, and God's people need to intensify their study of the Word and their fellowship with one another.

FOR THOUGHT: Does the viewpoint of this article help you to understand what is happening in the world today? Do you see that just before God moves to accomplish His great goals, He underscores the fruit of the determined actions of unbelievers?

BE FRUITFUL: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE “BE”

From earliest times, God has commanded fruitfulness. Think with me about it!

To living organisms of earth, God commanded: “. . . *Be, fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.*” Genesis 1:22. To mankind God said, “. . . *Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: . . .*” Genesis 1:28. One only needs to search a good concordance to see that this has been a consistent command that continued through Noah, Abraham, and his physical and spiritual offspring, so that the earth is indeed filled with all the various organisms of life.

However, It is spiritual fruit that God is looking for in individuals and corporately in His church. Paul explained it this way to the Church of Colossi, 1:10, *“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;”*

Accordingly, one will find no few references to the importance of His people being fruitful. The parable of the sower, Matthew 13, is a typical example. But perhaps the most underscored example would be that of John 15: His lesson on the vine and the branches. The branches (His people) are to bring forth fruit, but they can do so only as they abide (live in, remain attached to, follow the guidance of) the vine, and the vine is the Lord Jesus Himself, in the narrow path of life. Otherwise, the branches would bear no acceptable fruit and would be subject to being cut off, bundled and burned. Contrary to what some may infer from this, it is not the loss of spiritual salvation, but the loss of the reward of life at the Judgment Seat of Christ where every child of God will one day stand. Note 2 Cor. 5:10; I Cor. 3:9-16.

So, abiding in Christ is the underscored idea. Such abiding must be done His way, and not man’s way! It is here that one will do well to realize that “Christ” is a Greek word. In English it means “anointed.” In New Testament times only two entities have been anointed: the head of the body, and the body of the head. The head, Jesus, was anointed at His baptism. The body of the head, His church, was anointed by the same Holy Spirit on Pentecost. It is plain beyond argument.

It follows then that to abide in Jesus is to abide in His body, the pillar and ground of the truth. This denotes genuine membership in His body, but it also means an ongoing process of growth in grace and knowledge. It is as Paul told the church at Colossi, and also Timothy, to whom he said of God, *“Who will have all men saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth.”* I Timothy 2:4. Friends, that is the fruit God looks for in His disciples, so be fruitful. It is an important Bible “Be”

FOR THOUGHT: Have you ever seriously considered that it is not the purpose of a branch to worry about the production of fruit, but to allow the vine to produce fruit through it? How does that compare with people seeking to produce spiritual fruit by their own religious activities in conflict with the Word? Do you see that submission to God through a good working knowledge of His Word will allow God to accomplish what He pleases through you?

BE KIND: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE “BE”

“And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” Ephesians 4:32. Kindness, gentleness, tenderheartedness are just three dominant characteristics that God’s people are to employ in interpersonal relationships in the body of Christ. Think with me for a minute.

While not exactly synonymous, these characteristics are definitely linked to the greatest New Testament gift: love, by which all men may know that one is a disciple of the lowly, but most highly exalted Nazarene, John 13:35. The opposite of these divine requisites is selfishness. Perhaps this may be illustrated by the following humorous story.

Mr. “Me first” sat on the third pew from the front. He did a powerful lot of squirming during the sermon that did not go unnoticed by the pastor. At the invitation, the pastor just knew “Me First” would respond, but he did not. Afterwards, the pastor asked about it. “I noticed you were uncomfortable during the message,” said the pastor. “Why did you not respond during the invitation?” “Oh,” said Me First, “I was sitting on a wasp that was stinging me.” The pastor replied, “Why then did you not get up and move to another seat?” “No need” said “Me First,” I was hurting him worse than he was hurting me!” Extrapolating this into public, and brotherly relations in the church is the antithesis of the deep-seated love that Jesus said those who know Him should have for one another.

The exhortation to the Church at Ephesus amplified the idea of Christian kindness. It means to be tenderhearted, that is, easily touched and sympathetic to the plight of others in their struggles of life. Thus, forgiving one another, and that unlike the farmer who was bitten by a mad dog. He buried him all but the tail so that when he thought about it again, he could pull him out of the ground and hit him again with a shovel. To forgive does not mean to forget, which may be impossible, but to bury offenses so deeply they are not allowed to resurface. How completely did God, for the sake of Christ, forgive each of us who repent of sins? Here then is the divine pattern to be followed by everyone in the precious body of Christ. “Kindness, tenderheartedness, and forgiveness,” what marvelous requisites the true children of God have to indelibly mark their pilgrimage on earth as Christian. Be kind! It is an important Bible “Be!”

FOR THOUGHT: Have you observed that some folks think being kind is costly? May one be very serious and forceful while being kind? An old farmer once stated he could catch more flies with honey than he could with vinegar. Do you agree?

BE STILL: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE “BE”

Disquieted people are restless people inwardly and outwardly. Uncertain about their eternal status in Christ Jesus, they “hope” to be saved, and ever seek acts, deeds, and certain abstinence to enhance that possibility. Unfortunately, they have not entered the rest promised to believers in Hebrews Chapter Four. Instances of this human failure in matters of faith abound in the Holy Word. Let’s think about it!

Truly, the people of God are called to not sit on laurels, but to be busy in discipleship: the kind that honors God; that which is in conformity to His eternal Word. A cessation of that is not called for in Holy Writ, but encouraged evermore. It is the attempted infusion of fleshy thinking and works that are vain, and from which God leads believers away.

To determine that God wants one to engage in unspecified religious activity, even if it captivates the attention of large numbers of folks, is nothing short of what Jewish Zionism is all about: the works of the flesh and not of the Spirit. Paul forthrightly chided the churches of Galatia for this very thing, asking them that since they had begun by faith, would they now be made perfect through the works of the flesh? Thus, the reminder that it is not the activity of the flesh that God is looking for but the status of the believing heart.

Consider a very few biblical references to this idea. *“Except the LORD build the house the laborers labor in vain... Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh in vain...”* Psalm 127:1. *“But they that wait upon the Lord renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; . . .”* Isaiah 40:31. Running the Christian race is vitally important, but as Paul said, *“They who run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize; so run that you may win”* I Cor. 9:24. It was never the might of Hebrew armies that wrought victory in Israel, but the presence and power of God, casting on the enemies hail, hornets, outright fear, etc. Israel’s part was to believe Him and follow Him!

It would appear obvious then that the activities of today must be grounded incontrovertibly in “thus saith the Lord.” Running ahead of God was Saul’s problem, and his errors did not die with him. Since proper and acceptable works may be accomplished only as one employs them through Bible knowledge, it seems simple to deduce that knowledge in matters of faith should be the prime pursuit. All the works of man stems from that or its obvious absence. Anytime one feels that God is crippled or His Word outdated, he would do well to consult Psalm 46:10, *“Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”* Be Still! It is an important Bible “Be!”

FOR THOUGHT: As a believer, can you recall times when you trusted God for an outcome and impatiently sought to bring it about yourself? Have you trusted Him for an outcome and waited patiently, then marveled at how He worked it out? Does it give new meaning to Isa. 40:31?

BE WISE: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE “BE”

Far from being shortchanged, the topic of wisdom abounds in Holy Writ! Solomon had much to say about it in the books of his authorship: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Other writers give it a lofty place as well, including the Apostle Paul as he writes the doctrinal books of the Bible to various churches founded in his ministry. Think with me about it!

There are three great mental attributes lauded in scriptures as most worthy goals of pursuit by the people of God. The qualification “people of God” is employed simply because, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.”* Prov. 9:10. Here all three are mentioned as attributes that come from God as man qualifies to receive them through his reverence, study, and obedience to God and His Word.

It is said that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. Thus, to prayerfully search out and receive the knowledge afforded in the Bible is primary. It is an awareness of that which should be known. However, knowledge must be understood in order to be useful. Accordingly, Solomon goes on to say, *“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.”* Prov. 4:7. Paul admonished the church at Ephesus, *“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”* Eph. 5:17. Technically, wisdom then is the application of understood knowledge. One may not live long on the planet until it may be brutally underscored that understood knowledge may be applied in a very unwise manner; hence, the emphasis on wisdom as the attribute making knowledge and understanding practical and profitable.

Jesus told His disciples, *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.”* Matt. 10:6. How to acquire such a measure of wisdom to survive, and do well in that type of environment is the pleasure of James to reveal: *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”* James 1:5. Just how great then is this attribute called wisdom? Hear Solomon again, *“The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens.”* Prov. 3:19.

In the abundance of admonitions to acquire wisdom, the Bible studying Christian will inevitably conclude: Be Wise! It is an important Bible “Be.”

FOR THOUGHT: Are you impressed that the Bible emphasizes wisdom and understanding so much? How shall anyone go very far in life without these requisites? Knowledge is the platform, but wisdom and understanding are what make knowledge profitable.

BELIEVING IS SEEING

"... because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." John 20:29.

From time immemorial, men have sought a sign to facilitate belief. The Jews especially demanded a sign: to see must precede belief. Even today one of the states of our union is known as the "Show Me" state. But, must sight precede faith? Both the gospel and epistle writers used the power of sight as strong evidence in some cases, but they made it quite clear that seeing is not believing and that sight and faith are opposites.

Moreover, there is an old saying: "The hand is quicker than the eye." A slight of hand artist may make one believe that he could saw a living person into two parts, then produce that person whole without a scratch, and the list goes on. One can see, but also know that what he sees is invalid, and negates any vestige of belief.

Jesus said to doubting Thomas, *"... because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."* John 20:29. In spiritual matters, there is Divine order. He who comes to God must first believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Heb. 11:6. Hence it is the exercise of faith (believing) that enables one to see (understand, comprehend) and ensures that one day that which is seen or understood by faith will indeed become sight, physically.

Nicodemus was a master of Jewish religion, but he could not "see" the spiritual things Jesus talked about. Jesus underscored the prime position of belief when He told that man that except one be born from above, he could not see the kingdom of heaven. John 3.

Doubtless, the richest people in this world are not those with the large bank accounts, but those who have gone to sleep many nights on the banks of the Nile River, or hiked the desert with Moses, or bound their Isaac to an altar on Mt. Moriah. Through the medium of faith these and thousands of other life experiences are opened, especially a faith-sight (greater understanding) of Calvary, and of the grace that flows from the old rugged cross. Truly, spiritual things are spiritually discerned, and the carnal mind cannot receive those things. So, in matters that count, believing is seeing, not the other way around.

FOR THOUGHT: If spiritual realities are enigmatic to your mind, would you please ask God to come into your heart, cleanse you from sin, and open your eyes to spiritual things? If you have done this, study, meditation, and prayer are always in order as the life words of the Bible are considered. The more you do this, the more you will marvel at what you find that you did not "see" before.

BIBLE MYTHS EXPOSED

Doubtless most everyone in the Bible-belt is familiar with one or more old sayings that are attributed to the Bible, but in reality are not there. Here are a few. I suspect readers will all have others to add to the thought.

The Bible says: "Every tub must sit on its own bottom!" This is not in Holy Writ, although the principle is. Individual responsibility is underscored in 2 Thess. 3:10 and 2 Cor. 5:10 to list a few verses. But there are many that teach us to bear one another's burdens.

The Bible says: "There will be no tears in heaven." Quite the opposite is true! Tears will not be wiped away from the saints until after the millennial reign of Christ at the readiness to inhabit New Jerusalem on the New Earth, Rev. 21:4

The Bible says: "Before Jesus returns summer and winter will be indistinguishable." Sorry! The Bible says just the opposite in Genesis 8:22.

The Bible says: "If a man is saved, he will act like it." Well, we could all wish. Among the apostles, Judas betrayed Jesus, and Peter cursed to openly deny Him. The Christian struggle is ongoing in every saved person; not to stay saved, but to live a rewarding Christian life. Repentance is a daily need. Romans 7; I Cor. 15:31

The Bible says: "Angels co-habited with humans, causing the Noahic Flood." No so! Angels are ministering (intellectual) spirits. They are sexless as Jesus plainly said, Matt 22:30

The Bible says: "We shall know as we are known, meaning we will have the same level of awareness and knowledge in eternity as we do here." Sorry again! This is a verse in I Cor. 13:12 taken out of context. It speaks of the completion of the Bible so that all, including Paul could know the Word as plainly as he himself was known. To equate the final state of man as equal destroys the very meaning of discipleship, judgment, reward, etc.

Yes, there are others, many others. The amazing thing is that in this country every family may have multiple bibles. Why would anyone then believe anything some sinful humans told them without checking it out with the Holy Word? Yes, it is amazing, and destructive!

FOR THOUGHT: What else have you heard that is reportedly in the Bible? Do you receive it or them without checking them against the Bible? Have you ever startled a Bible quoting person by asking for the address of a verse of Scripture that teaches what he says? Try it?

BORN TO DO WHAT NO MAN COULD DO!

“ But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” Hebrews 2:9

The human family began in the Garden of Eden. In that pristine environment the federal head of humanity had the opportunity to partake of the Tree of Life. He would then be sealed in righteousness, and his offspring would be born in righteousness rather than in sin. But, Adam failed! Consequently, men are born with a sinful nature that forever eliminates any possibility of being in the presence of the Creator in heaven and all that entails. But, this reality was fixed on the day of his creation: whatever happens to man will be of man's own doing, and no force will negate his power of choice! Thus did man find himself to be a sinner in the Garden, dooming not only himself, but all his posterity. The result of sin is death, and death has passed upon all men for that all have sinned. Think with me about this awful, locked-in scenario!

To redeem His creation, God in incomprehensible love and grace affixed His own eternal destiny with that of His creation by becoming one of us. Born of a virgin, the Holy Spirit His Father, He did not inherit the sinful nature, but came into the world as a man to succeed where Adam had failed.

But wait! Death is the result of sin. Jesus is the sinless Son of God. How then could He possibly die, knowing no sin? The answer lies in revisiting the Garden of Gethsemane on the evening of His arrest. Jesus prayed while disciples slept. He sweat as it were great drops of blood in anticipation of the awful deed that was His alone to accomplish.

Upon identifying Himself to the arresting soldiers, they all fell involuntarily to the ground. Evil had come with evil intent to the righteous, Creator God of heaven and earth. They could not take Him. They could not harm Him. He was sinless! It was only by the grace of God that they were allowed to arise and proceed with their evil deed. It was then and there that Jesus fulfilled the great initial process of *“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me, nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.”* This means that Jesus submitted to the massive load of sin. Sin was not in Him, but sin was upon Him. This is the only possibility of His being beaten and crucified. Think! Here was God in human form doing what no other man on earth could do, defeating sin, and paying the price of every person who through faith would appropriate His sacrifice as their own. Thus does every member of the human race have hope. One of us has overcome sin, and is seated at the right hand of the Father. Because He overcame, we may overcome in Him. What is plan “B” one may ask. There is none! Now, the door is open to life, to heaven, to inheritance in Him.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you know that Jesus said that no man could take His life from Him? It was His to give, and He voluntarily became the substitute of every believing offspring of Adam. Have you received His precious gift of eternal life? Will you do so now, by admitting that you are indeed a sinner, then inviting Him into your heart as your personal Savior?

BREAKING BANDS AND SEVERING CORDS

When there are no banks to restrict the flow of water, a river ceases to exist, spreading as a lake to harbor whatever filth may come its way. Similarly, when there is no restriction of human life through the foundational laws of the Judeo-Christian ethic every man does that which is right in his own eyes. The resident sin in men runs rampant.

The twenty-first century world clamors for chaos, and is not unlike the description presented in the second Psalm. *"The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the LORD, (Jehovah/Jesus) and against his anointed (His church, the pillar and ground of the truth) saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."* This Psalm may be shown to have historic value, but it certainly is applicable to the current time of the last days.

Civilization has risen to great heights by obedience to the laws of the Creator/God of the universe. However, as the holy bands and cords are cast off, iniquity and chaos rush in to fill the void.

Moreover, the process is somewhat subtle to the theologically ignorant. It is not an immediate, full blown honoring of evil, but it begins with a denial of God as the Creator of the universe, and all life therein, and proceeds to finally deny God altogether. Additionally, wrong is called good, and good is called wrong. The end result is the production of a godless, antichrist society that Paul wrote to Timothy about so long ago in 2 Tim. 3. It is a setting of the world stage for the final act of the age; precise, accurate, unyielding judgment in full measure.

Why are men willingly ignorant of eternal truth, and determined to cast off the bands and cords of the Creator? It is because of the presence of sin, and their love for darkness rather than light, as Jesus put it in John 3.

While this present age of grace lasts, it is called TODAY. The plea of the Holy Spirit of God to the heart of every person is to repent of sin, and take the light yoke of the Lord Jesus: to serve Him in the goodness and blessings of a life well lived.

The Holy Spirit never shirks responsibility, so wrong doing in every person is met with a sense of shame and reproach. It has a purpose, a very important purpose. It is the open door to repentance and forgiveness that cannot be obtained any other way, and it will not always be available. Consequently, men should be wiser than those described in Psalm 2. Instead of counseling together to break bands and cast off cords, they should welcome with open arms the conviction of the Holy Spirit and that open door of repentance while it remains.

FOR THOUGHT: Changes brought about over the last 70 years are staggering; more than what was experienced for thousands of years before then. Do you think the rapidity of these changes tend to move people away from faith to embrace more fully materialism? Do you see the church being marginalized more with each generation? Where will you cast your lot in life?

BRINGING IN THE CHEESE?

An old, favorite hymn in older song books is "Bringing in the Sheaves." Children often hear this as "Bringing in the Cheese," and wonder what it is all about. Indeed, the polling of a modern congregation of adults revealed that they also did not understand the meaning of the word "sheaf" the singular of "sheaves."

In Biblical times, grains such as wheat, barley, oats, etc. were harvested by hand. The grain stalks were severed close to the ground with a sickle or scythe. An arm load of the severed stalks were then tied into a bundle: a sheaf to be transported to a threshing floor where the edible grain was removed, and the residual chaff and straw separated for other purposes. So, bringing in the sheaves spoke of an abundant harvest. It was a time of rejoicing for the blessing of an overflowing food supply for families, animals, and for substance of trade for other needed things.

In the spiritual world, a sinner saved is a harvest of eternal joy. Snatched from the flames of hell, he is both a part of a harvested sheaf as well as a new harvester of yet others who make up sheaves for the master, and rejoicing for all. In the Day of the Lord, many of God's people will be joyously surprised to learn how their dedication to Christ Jesus has influenced others, even sheaves of others. Likewise, there will be tears of sorrow shed over wasted lives with no sheaves for the Master; perhaps not even a single sheaf.

Truly, the cheese in the child's understanding may bring smiles to the flesh, but sheaves will bring eternal joy in the presence of the Lord. How then shall an assurance of sheaves be anticipated? As with any other harvest of good things, seeds must be sown and watered. The seed is the Word of God, and the water is human tears of love and compassion. The Psalmist wrote: "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him," Psalm 126:5-6.

Hear then the Lord Jesus as He says to His disciples, *"Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest."* John 4:35. Let the cheese have its place, to nourish the body, but let all of God's people be concerned with the welfare of never-dying spirits of men. Let us work to bring in the sheaves for the glory of God.

FOR THOUGHT: With the love that a lot of church folks have for potluck, one might wonder if the cheese is not more important to them than the sheaves. On the other hand do you think that often people try to force a harvest of sheaves when they might be better off sticking to the cheese? In other words, isn't it true that God alone must be the force in individual hearts to produce heaven bound sheaves? Are you one shock of good wheat in God's sheaves?

BURNING HEART OR HEARTBURN?

Sometime back, I drove past a sign that read: CHURCH OF THE BURNING HEART. I thought that was a little unusual for the name of a church. Upon further inquiry, I learned that it was like so many other religious clubs that dot the landscape in these last days. It was what one would call independent, but more precisely non-denominational. That simply means it does not affiliate with any known and named group of churches both in affiliation and in doctrinal standing. Of course, there are enough non-denominational churches that they would be a denomination but for the lack of affiliation among themselves or any cohesiveness to their doctrinal standing. It seems they just want to present themselves to the public as totally free, thus better, than any church that is known by its doctrinal standing. As a result what is commonly held among them is the doctrine of universal, invisible church which necessitates open communion. Furthermore, they have no qualms about baptismal source or mode, and most do not maintain a church membership role due to their universal thinking. But these things effectively negate personal responsibility, and personal accountability in the mind of men who have an innate desire to worship God due to their being made in His image. However, the appeal succeeds largely in moving men into further estrangement from their Creator by a form of godliness that denies the power thereof.

As more and more of these types of “churches” arise, one may wonder at the wonder of it all. Would the Holy Spirit lead men to a form of worship that is in rebellion to plain biblical teachings? Is it possible that God would accept a form of doctrine that is out of conformity to His Word? Has the blood-bathed battle of His churches throughout the last 2,000 years been in vain; their form of worship and division of the Word of truth wrong?

The apostle John has the answer in his first epistle: *Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*” 2:18-20. Compared to Holy Writ, a better name for the aforementioned group might be THE CHURCH OF THE HEARTBURN, big time!

As sweet as they are, let it be recalled that Jesus did not make His people to be sugar, but salt! Moreover, the disastrous results of salt that loses its savor is graphically presented in plain terms! Matt. 5:13.

FOR THOUGHT: The question that remains begging is may the Creator God of the universe be worshipped in any way men see fit, or must He be worshipped in conformity to His Word? Could “Burning heart” be understood as “Heartburn?” Who is in the driver’s seat in these things? Is it God, or is it men?

CELEBRATING THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF JESUS

The indispensable, foundation, and cornerstone of Christianity is the reality of the virgin birth of the Lord Jesus, The Christ. In this singular truth do all who claim to be Christian agree. That fact is not argumentative, optional, acceptable in any possible way of any alternate viewpoint. Of course, there are religions that scoff, and deny outright this foundational fact as being a myth or the fanciful concoctions of crutch-needing fanatics. Consider this with me!

Islamic people will agree that Jesus was a prophet; that He was virgin born; even that He lived a sinless life, but vehemently deny that He was the only begotten son of God; that He died on the cross and arose from the dead. Their take is that Judas Iscariot was substituted for Jesus before the actual crucifixion, and that Jesus went to heaven unharmed.

Again, the Mormon religion scoffs at the virgin birth of Jesus: that it was the Holy Spirit that caused the virgin Mary to become pregnant, and that He therefore was NOT the ONLY begotten Son of God. Their take on this is that if that were true, then it would be very dangerous to confirm females, lest the Holy Spirit make them all pregnant, inundating the elders with children to care for, which would put them in dire straits.

Well so much for the doubters and scoffers. If one can think of it, there is probably someone out there teaching it regardless of how it may contradict the clear statement of the Holy, plenary, inerrant Word. I think of my mother who often said, "You can hear anything but meat frying and money rattling." That is to say, all talk and no substance!

Thankfully, the universal, Holy Spirit conviction placed upon all men is that they are, without exception, sinners. Moreover, no sinner is able to redeem himself from that state, let alone pay the redemptive price of others. Then let it be shouted from the rooftops that the Bible is the ultimate truth; that Jesus was and is the only begotten son of God! This fact necessitates that He had no earthly father; hence virgin born. If this is untrue, no one is saved; all are condemned without remedy; hell is the only eternal destiny, and Christians are of all men most miserable.

Thus did the angel correctly and forthrightly declare to Joseph "*. . . fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.*" Matt. 1:20-21. My Savior was God and man. He walked among men, paid the sin-price of men, but he was not an offspring of earthly men!

FOR THOUGHT: Aside from the ultimate authority: the Word, if the Holy Spirit effects a birth from above in every believer, why would it be thought a strange thing that the Holy Spirit should effect the birth of one in material life, even Jesus? Every man is a sinner. Do you know of a way that a sinner may become sinless?

CHOICES WE MAKE, THINGS WE DO

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish.” Psalm 1:1-6

Pick it out! In the Psalm above, there is (1) something to NOT do. (2) something to do. (3) The attendant reward of life of both actions, and (4) the future status of those values and lifestyles.

Believing that these things are literally true, what kind of commitment should every person make to the Great, Creator, Savior God? Those who have the “born from above” experience in life know right well that they came to God in repentance of sins, accepting Christ Jesus as their personal Savior, and that without any reservation. But, in the course of life there are the battle lines and conflict times. Being a Christian is enjoyable from the viewpoint of formal worship, social fellowship, and times of ease and peace, but what about the other times? When life becomes stormy, friends are critical, oppression heated, embarrassment certain, or for some other reason we become just plain doubtful. What then? Often commitment to Christ falls victim to fleshly reservation to alter or tweak that commitment to a more comfortable position in the flesh. But do we have that right? The answer must be a resounding “NO” we do not! Moreover such failures in Christian life evidence that the wonderful, promise-filled scriptures as Psalm One, Romans 8:28, Hebrews 13:5 do not have their place properly embedded in the heart.

A committed relationship with Christ Jesus is not a “tit-for-tat, if you will do this, I will do that,” affair. It is more like a binding contract that consists of a blank page of paper offered to God with your signature at the bottom. It is a willingness for God to implement whatever terms of life he has designed for you in the full realization that He is the Creator; we are the created; we are the saved; He is the Savior. We are the subjects of judgment; He is the Judge. Any withdrawal of our commitment to Him, or any reservation or exception to His will must be labeled plainly and simply what it is: sin! Obedience to God is not just a good idea, it is always right. Resting in His mighty hands is the best possible place for one’s life. It is also the place where His choice blessings are realized. Maybe it is time for many of us to revisit our commitment to Christ in day to day life. The outcome of that commitment will be realized as revealed in Psalm One. There will be no exceptions.

FOR THOUGHT: If commitment to Christ is to be taken as seriously as the Bible presents it, how can it be right to say “Just attend the church of your choice?” Should it not rather be “Attend the church of His choice?” How can there be justification of life fashioned by personal preference, social mores, and not by the teaching of Him Whom we profess to worship?

CHRISTIAN DEFINED AT ANTIOCH

“ . . . And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Acts 11:26

That Jesus did not name the spiritual body known as His New Testament Church is a wonderful curiosity. Initially, the lack of a name led the enemies of the church to simply call it *“That Way.”* Disciples so identified knew the wrath of Saul of Tarsus who under Jewish authority imprisoned men and women, and intended to imprison others in Damascus, but the Lord intervened.

However, the name that would stick, “Christians” came from Antioch of Syria, recorded in Acts 11. Here, it was not the church that named itself, but the community at large. So, the question is begged, “Why did they choose that name? The obvious answer is not too difficult to uncover. First, the people spoke the Aramaic and Koine Greek languages. They understood perfectly what “Christian” meant. The term was not translated into English by Bible translators, but its transliteration (bodily assertion) into English successfully created a lasting misunderstanding of the term.

Since “Christian” means “anointing” or the “ones anointed,” the term should have been so translated. Consequently, the weakening of it caused this original meaning to be practically obscured. In these modern times, it matters little about the originator, origin, or core doctrines of a “church,” or anyone associated with it. It is called “Christian.”

Nevertheless, the truth that emanates from the New Testament qualifying “Christian” is that the so-named church of the Lord Jesus Christ was begun by Jesus Himself, at approximately 30 A.D. Its core doctrines include, but are not limited to, the sinfulness of every human being; salvation of one’s spirit by grace through faith plus nothing else; eternal security of every believer in Christ Jesus; and baptism is immersion in water of a professed believer by a New Testament Church which is always a local institution.

The Grecian people at Antioch witnessed the presence of these things being adamantly proclaimed by the church there. They saw that this group of people were in fact anointed by the same Spirit that anointed Jesus at His baptism, and the church at Pentecost.; therefore, they purposefully named them as they saw them. Additionally, their kind and these teachings continue to this very day. Such are the legitimate successors of that first church which was promised perpetuity. Here then are “Christians” in the strictest sense of the word. The world may call others “Christian” but the day of the Lord when all must stand before Him will underscore without deviation from this Biblical definition of the true church, which alone properly bears the distinction in earthly life as “Christian!”

FOR THOUGHT: Does this article connote restrictive ideas to you of what a true Christian is to be? Do you agree that all that is called “Christian,” is not truly Christian? Why do you think the common people called the followers of Jesus “Christian?” How would you define the term?

CHRISTIAN DRESS CODE

James 2:1-4, *"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?"*

I suppose that one's viewpoint on appropriate dress may be related to a number of factors: age, culture, customs of a given locale, but far from least should be the occasion. This writer came from another time, a time when clothing was harder to come by. In early post-depression days, animal feed sacks were chosen carefully when making a purchase because someone was going to be wearing it pretty soon. Subsequently, optional dress was virtually non-existent, but cleanliness was given a very high priority.

When Sunday came, there was no question as to where the family would be found. It was church whether it was preaching Sunday or not. In the absence of a circuit rider, dad always gave an extended devotional following Sunday School. I never heard a word about the appropriateness of attire regarding our family or anyone else in church, provided the apparel was clean. In most cases, it was not only clean, but also the best we had (and yes, I have gone to both school and church in warmer months barefooted, and was far from alone. One pair of shoes came in late fall. If guests were coming to our house, mom and dad always did their best. If we went anywhere to visit or keep an appointment, we always looked our best. It was an unequivocal way of life.

In keeping with that training, I have never criticized one's clothing, if clean. I have no qualms about women wearing nice slacks or pantsuits, or men forfeiting a coat and tie in church services, but I do raise an eyebrow at modern, overt attempts to look much less than one's best. If I had an appointment with a corporate board to interview for an important job, or a banquet invitation from a high political dignitary, I would respect the event and the privilege of personal participation enough to not show up in common, everyday dress, if I had better apparel. Surely, there is no more important reason to look one's best than to meet with the chosen people of God, even the bride of Christ, knowing that in the Holy Spirit the Savior, Foundation, and Head of the church is also there. So, I will not criticize the appearance of others so long as what they wear is clean, decent, modest, but when you see me at church I will look my best, which isn't anything to brag about, but it is as good as it gets.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe that how one dresses is largely a product of culture, and generation, and that cleanliness and decency should be the overriding factor in appearance? Can you think of at least one of many Bible verses that addresses this subject?

CHRISTIAN HUMOR NOT SACRILEGE OR TABOO!

It is strange, but there are folks who reflect annoyance or downright anger at any manifestation of humor by a Christian. Indeed, some people appear to have no sense of humor at all. That status signals to me the presence of a very unhappy person. But let stoicism be “enjoyed” by others who do not rejoice in the blessed hope of happiness, and let it be abandoned by redeemed hearts.

No one on the planet should be more happy, peaceable, and quick to recognize good humor than a serious follower of Jesus. Those who fit this identification savor joy, and engage in rejoicing that simply passes all understanding. They are able to project joy and happiness in the face of pain or other distasteful discouragements. It is not a denial of the negative aspects of life, but the anointed ability to rise above them. Love is the badge of a true Christian, and love, among so many other things, appreciates good, wholesome humor.

Good humor ranks high among many reasons why the fellowship of knowledgeable, dedicated believers is so desired, and so precious. In this context, one does not have to “walk on eggshells” for fear of offending someone, and the health benefits of a hearty laugh that is not at someone else’s expense is treasured. Solomon put it this way: *“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.”* Proverbs 17:22.

There is an old saying, “Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry, and cry alone.” Indeed, this reflects the nature of preferred human emotions. It is not that weeping has no place or even is out of order. There are times when it is the only thing that is in order, but not as a daily philosophy of life.

Some would purport that God is not a God of humor. For the life of me, I simply cannot understand how anyone can look at creation, and all that is in it which God has made and still think He has no sense of humor!

The Psalmist affirmed that one day God, Himself will laugh at foolish men who have sinned away their day of grace. Psalm 2:4; 59:8, Proverbs 1:26.

Moreover, who can help but rejoice with the Hebrews in their release from captivity and return to Jerusalem. Of them it is written, *“When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The Lord hath done great things for them. The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.”* Psalm 126:1-3.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you think the presence of wholesome humor is a good thing in a Christian’s life? Do you enjoy a hearty laugh now and then? Do you think of serious situations sometimes and lighten them with humor? What is your estimation of a merry heart?

CHRISTIAN SLAVERY??

I am not seeking to wrinkle horns or to lose friends, but sometimes a subject just won't leave me alone. I refer to the subject of slavery, and the fact that I hear an almost universal condemnation of it from saints and sinners alike. So, I just have to think about it, and then I just have to write a little about it. Bear with me.

Slavery has been around almost as long as the oldest profession. So, throughout the Old Testament times it was prevalent among God's people and widespread elsewhere. Then throughout the times of the New Testament it was widespread even in the churches. Moreover, there are places in the world today where it is a common practice, but the strictest form of it ended legally in the United States over one hundred years ago.

When one surveys the Word on the subject, he is likely to read: *"Art thou called being a servant? (Gr. "doulos." slave) care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."* 1 Cor. 7:21-22. Moreover, the book of Philemon was written by the apostle Paul to the Christian master of a run-a-way, but now Christian slave: Onesimus, seeking leniency for him. Indeed, there is much to be said biblically in favor of the master/servant relationship of men. The Old Testament gave specific instructions on how one was to be noted as a lifelong slave to his master: piercing the ear and inserting a ring. Exodus 21:6, et.al. "Hummmm!"

Certainly, nowhere in Holy Writ will it be found that a sinful or abusive relationship is to exist among men regardless of their status; but the exact opposite. Comparing this with many unethical actions of modern day employers against their employees might make the more permanent master/servant relationship appear desirable to some.

In any event, one should be terribly slow to condemn what the Bible recognizes as being in play, but does not condemn. It just might be that if the master/servant relationship still existed here among men, the idea of that relationship with the Lord would be enhanced. In casting off the bonds of servitude to men, servitude to God has also been largely cast aside, too. That, my friends, is not a good thing!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you know of anyone who admits to being a bond-slave to the Lord? Should you know many people with such an admission? Why do you think the Bible never condemn slavery as such, but soundly condemns man's inhumanity to man?

CHRISTMAS AND THE BECOMING "I AM"

The richness of language is used to span the literal, the figurative, the physical and the spiritual, the formal and colloquial, and the Bible is filled with all of these applications. Therefore, it is incumbent upon all who would know the true things of God, and of life itself to seriously heed the admonition of 2 Timothy 2:15: study to rightly divide, to arrive at the proper understanding and application of Holy Writ. The meaning of Christmas was revealed millennia ago to Moses and to the enslaved Hebrew people. Think with me for a moment!

Most nominal Christians are passingly familiar with the "*I am that I am*" of Exodus 3:14: the name God applied to Himself, and told Moses to reveal to his brethren in Egypt. However, translation to various languages has its problems, and decisions of translators must be studied. Here, it should be noted that "I am" is present tense in English, but the Hebrew language does not have tense in verbs: only complete and incomplete states. The incomplete state of this name in Hebrew means it could be translated in English: I have been Whom I have been; I am Who I am; or I shall become Whom I shall become. Certainly the sense of the eternal is depicted, but in recognition that God continually revealed Himself by different names to His people as He moved to fulfill their needs, the latter is preferred as offering the best understanding. After all, the Hebrews were praying for God to come or become to them in forward action of deliverance. Moreover, the "LORD" (Jehovah) of the Old Testament is indeed the Jesus of the New Testament, and He is the final and ultimate "becoming" of God to man. This was fulfilled initially in the great story of His birth as recorded in Luke chapter two, and presently celebrated as Christmas.

Yet, there is another sense of understanding that magnificent name. It is not the revelation of a new personage, but that of the "coming one" even the same Jesus, but now glorified Jesus as the Ruler, Judge and Lord of the planet, and all therein in the great millennial reign. Thus shall the ultimate fulfillment of the name He gave to Moses so long ago be fully realized by His people of covenant in a manner that shall remain eternal. It is then that He shall remain as it would be expressed in the English, "I AM!" What an exceedingly marvelous, and logical extension of thought as focus is retrained on His birth. Here then is the true meaning and joy of Christmas!

FOR THOUGHT: Christmas is a lonely time for some folks. Is it that way for you? Christmas is a very happy and joyful time for many. Is it that way for you? The difference is often the result of focus. Is it on the din and noise of materialism, or on the blessedness of God becoming a man?

CHRISTMAS FACTS AND FALLACIES

1. Jesus was born on December 25th in the year zero A.D.
This is a fallacy. No one knows the date of Jesus' birth nor the exact year.
2. Jesus was born in a barn.
This is a fallacy. He was born in a "stable" but this was most likely a cave like structure that shepherds often used to house their animals. There are many such in that area.
3. Three wise men came from the east to worship him.
This is a fallacy. The Bible does not say there were three. It simply states that wise men came from the east. There may have been three or perhaps more. Three is usually associated with the three types of gifts
4. The wise men found Jesus lying in a manger.
This is a fallacy. They found Jesus and his mother in a house. So, it was quite some time later that they found him. It may have been up to two years since Herod diligently inquired of them the time of the star, then he killed all males in Bethlehem two year old and younger.
5. Christmas has been celebrated by Christians since His resurrection.
This is a fallacy. Christmas is a combination of the words "Christ" + "Mass" evolved over time, incorporating several "winter festivals" of different countries and cultures. It has come to incorporate many religious and secular ideas.
6. Christmas is a federal holiday in the United States of America.
This is fact. It was passed into law in 1870.
7. It is O.K. for Christians to celebrate Christmas.
This is fact. It is a federal holiday. But as in all things, Christians must remember and emphasize that Christmas is to us a remembrance and a joyful telling of the glad tidings to all people. That unto us a Son is given, unto us a Savior is born.
8. Gifts should be given at Christmas.
This is fact. The giving of gifts is an expression of love and joy. Moreover, it is a testimony of blessings received from God. It is sad that so many "churches" use the occasion to raise funds just like the secular, business world does. Normally, gifts are given to the one whose birthday it is. So what shall we say about a gift for Jesus? Give Him your heart. There is no gift so precious to Him as a commitment of our very life – the life He died to save.

FOR THOUGHT: What does Christmas mean primarily to you? What does it mean to the business community? What does it mean to some religious organizations?

CHRISTMAS WITHOUT LIGHTS

As a small child, I was often sent by my mother to a neighbor's house to borrow a couple of eggs or a cup of sugar or to repay such. Neighbors did that often in those days. This embedded in my little mind what is now an interesting and amusing story about Christmas.

The Dillard house did not have electricity until my early teens. Neither was there running water or any indoor plumbing, but that was common in the country. (I know, you are thinking of stories of the embellishment of tougher times, but hang on). When Christmas time came one year, we did the usual: cut a small cedar tree, strung popcorn, and cut ornaments from colored construction paper, and somehow managed to acquire icicles to complete the decorations (No, there was no "Good night, John, Boy!")

Our neighbor up the road had recently gotten electricity. They had a beautiful tree with bubbling lights. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever seen, and it was hard to get me away from staring at it for the longest time. Then one day it hit me. Perhaps we could borrow some electricity for our tree. After all, we borrowed and lent other things often. So, I appeared at the neighbor's door: a four year old lad with a large paper sack. I proudly announced to the kind neighbor lady that I wanted to borrow a sack of electricity so we could have a pretty Christmas tree. She was so taken aback by the request that she became speechless. How could she tell me that she could not lend me a sack of electricity? Well, we survived that year with our homely decorated tree, and in time we, too, had electricity.

Such memories of childhood are vivid, and presently the source of amusement, but though deprived of electricity, we were not deprived of the meaning of Christmas. Love lived in our little country home, and gifts were more often "a gift," but the Gift of God lived in the hearts of all the family who were old enough to understand, and in appropriate time, all of the family. We were never devoid of the truly important light. *"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men!"* John 1:4. Moreover, *"...God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all!"* I John 1:5. What kind of light is prominent in your home this Christmas, electric or divine? If it is only the former, then I pray your heart may be opened and receptive to the true light of heaven and earth!

FOR THOUGHT: It is easy to be amused over a child now understanding why electricity cannot be borrowed, but what about adults thinking spirituality can be given them by neighbors or some minister or church? Only a personal connection with God can produce spirituality. Is that not why Jesus came into the world?

CHURCH BY EVOLUTION

"And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you;" I Thessalonians 5:12.

There are some things that are easy to believe, but difficult to prove. In fact, most things in the spirit world are that way to the carnal mind. It is the intent of this short article to draw attention to the folly of New Testament church existence by evolution. Please think for a moment with me.

Most Baptists readily agree that a New Testament church cannot be divorced from its membership. Therefore, the qualifications of each church member become all important to the spiritual status of the local body to which he belongs. As the members go, so goes the church for better or worse.

It is equally agreed among non-Protestant Baptist churches that the new birth experience, and deep water baptism by the authority of the church is essential, constituting the prerequisites necessary for church membership. By these things, and the fulfillment of the other parts of the Great Commission, churches are kept separate from the world, from false religion, and in an acceptable state to enjoy the blessings of the Almighty in word, and in deed.

With all this being said, it is recognized that there are a lot of "Speckled Bird" churches in Baptist ranks today. Some are "planted" by men who care little for the fundamentals of the faith once delivered to the saints. Some are socio-religious gatherings that "evolve" into a "church." This method was used by the Wesley brothers, but their production was not a New Testament church.

Then there are those who pick no bones about their disdain for the Baptist heritage. They refuse to use the Baptist name, and think to create a church by some sort of deception, deception I say because they still want to claim scriptural Baptist status. Humm. Does that not sound much like so many who call themselves "non-denominational" or "Usta-Wazer" Baptists? That former title is an oxymoron simply because non-denomination is a denomination with reference to type or kind.

So, the questions remain. Might a group of people, two or three or more, achieve a non-profit charter to claim tax exemption, engage in religious activity, and grow into a bona fide New Testament church regardless of their prerequisites? More precisely stated, may a group of religious minded people evolve into a New Testament church?

When the Word is followed, only those who are endowed with the new birth, and scriptural, deep water baptism administered by a bona fide church of the Lord, may constitute a church that is recognized and blessed of heaven. Such is the perpetuation of the baptism of John (heaven- sent baptism). There may be many ceremonial washings and dips, but there is only one baptism of John. So, a church by evolution? That is biblically unknown, and in the end worthless.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe anyone who wants many formulate themselves into a church, especially, if they have a non-profit charter from the state? Well, to be sure, there are many of them just that way. Do you think the righteous God of heaven and earth will accept such when He formulated His own and died to purchase it?

CHURCH KINGDOM-BUILDING MAY MISS THE KINGDOM BUILT

Long, long ago, God forged a mighty nation of Hebrew people enslaved in Egypt. He delivered them, blessed them, and brought them to the Promised Land. Extraordinary victories, great miracles, and provisions attributable only to God's blessings were embedded into their minds and hearts, but Judges tells the repetitious story of the propensity of men to follow the flesh instead of God. A new generation arose that knew not God. “. . . *every man did that which was right in his own eyes.*” Judges 21:25. Sadly, men have not changed!

Fast forward! Out of the deadly fires of persecution in the Inquisition, God delivered His people by opening up the Western Hemisphere in general and America in particular for their unparalleled freedom and growth. Through famine, wars, and civil turmoil, God blessed His churches in this new land. It was then that the god of this world laid plans to inundate the nation with material things far removed from the support of its Gross National Product by printing baseless script to direct faith toward Caesar. Misled churches hailed this as blessings from above. Simply put, it is easier, and highly tempting, to follow the dictates of the flesh.

Soon, churches, which flourished briefly in inflated abundance, found unwittingly that materialism had substituted God. Youth then failed to follow the faith of their fathers. Pulpits became filled with stand-up comedians and CEO's of social clubs. Services were scaled down.

Revivals ceased. God was removed from public prayers and schools. Innocent lives were butchered on demand by the millions. Churches became even more moderate, bowing to a social agenda in an ever-losing battle for the attention of the masses.

At last, some have awakened to ask why the rolls are full, but the pews are empty? It is the continuing last state of churches whose members are detached from the spirit and mission of the church. Oh, but those roll members are indeed attached. They are attached to their detachment, and few are open to change. Churches previously offering men spiritual salvation and truth, sank in their deluded dream of individual kingdom-building, and panic of material debts. So gravitating to social programs to compete, they ultimately found themselves inadequate to compete materially in a God forsaken religious world, or able to deal properly and spiritually with people who are minus an ear for spiritual things, not unlike the society of Lot's day. Church-house padlocks are now becoming common. What a crazy course of history! What foolish decisions by spiritual institutions! Caring ministers and churches now cry and preach to a people firmly attached. . . to spiritual detachment! Evermore then is the cry heard: “Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus.”

FOR THOUGHT: Have you ever asked yourself just where in the Bible is it written that the will of God is for local churches to build great monuments to themselves, and revel in their material riches? Have you read the message to Laodicea in Revelation Chapter Three?

CINDERELLA AND THE LORD'S BRIDE

"Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all." Prov. 31:29

Is there anyone, especially in the English speaking world, who is not well versed in the classic fairytale of Cinderella? Here are the highlights: her mother had died; her father remarried a mean woman with two ugly daughters who received all of her attention and gifts. Cinderella must work hard, and had little more than rags for clothing, but in them she was beautiful. However, at the king's ball, Cinderella was magically prepared for a meeting with the prince of the kingdom. Then departing at the midnight hour, she lost one glass slipper. The love that the prince felt for her led to a search of the kingdom to find her by a perfect fit of the slipper. Of course, only Cinderella could be a perfect fit for the slipper, although others including her ugly, mean stepsisters tried in vain. Thus was Cinderella united with the prince of the kingdom and lived happily ever after.

Perhaps this analogy is a little crude, but the Prince of the Kingdom of the Heavens has a bride. Currently it is subjected to a world with evil as its god. It has not been treated well during the age, but there is a marriage supper coming. Many who have supplanted themselves as the bride cannot and will not be accepted simply because they do not fit the criteria of the Prince. That criterion is not the awesome edifices of towers and stained glass or of systems by which men act religiously within their own sinful creations. His bride will fit the marvelous slipper of His bridal creation, and succession, tenaciously holding to the faith once delivered to the saints, and trench work of carrying out the Great Commission. She shall thus be gloriously accepted, and shown to be just who she really is as she rules and reigns with the Prince of the Universe, her creator and glorious Savior and King.

It seems inescapably logical then that the most important thing anyone can do with his time on earth is to search out that criteria, know it, and put his life into it by consistently yielding to the leadership of the Holy Spirit as presented in the Holy Word. It is never the will of men that shall be accepted, as so vividly underscored in Matthew 7:21-23. Rather, it is the stated will of God alone that shall be accepted. The good news is that His acceptable will for men may be grasped and employed by everyone while it is called "Today." But, everyone must be wise enough to know that "Today" is coming to an end, and sooner for some than others. What on earth could be more worthy than this for one's time and energies??? What??? . . . What???

FOR THOUGHT: Does the analogy drawn here make sense to you? Are you preparing yourself to be a part of the glorious bride of Christ through obedience to the faith once delivered to the saints? Can you read the analogy without identifying with Cinderella?

CLIPPED-WING CHICKENS STILL FLY!

From the memory vaults of decades long gone comes a story of a lesson learned as a child in the country. Most families back then had all the trappings of basic life support, including a large number of chickens. Breakfast and Sunday dinner tables were completed with their contribution and sacrifice. One day several of the chickens began to fly up and over the six-foot fence of their penned area. Mom gave a pair of scissors to my older brother with instructions to clip a small amount of feather from their wing. Later, she noticed the chickens still flying out of the pen, and asked if he had done as she instructed. He answered in the affirmative, but upon questioning it was learned that he had clipped both wings of each chicken instead of just one. Of course, that did not work. The whole idea of keeping the chickens earthbound was to create imbalance by clipping only one wing. Thus came the old saying of someone deemed to be too haughty or “uppity” he or she needed their wing clipped. My brother’s action failed to achieve the objective because it allowed the chickens to maintain the necessary balance to fly.

It is also true that to fly in spiritual matters one must also have balance. Such balance is denied natural man due to his sinful nature which does not harmonize or balance with the spiritual things of God and His righteousness. So, he remains “earthbound” by his sinful condition even while he seeks to be spiritual in religious affairs. He is desperately in need of the balance to fly, but it is beyond his ability, or reach, naturally. So, what, if anything, can be done to achieve spiritual balance and flying status? The answer is not complicated. The ancient prophet said it in a verse of scripture that has become the favorite to many: *“Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”* Isaiah 40:30-31. Here then is God’s way for mankind: wait upon the Lord. Such waiting denotes looking to; trusting, depending upon. Those who are tired of being “earthbound” by a nature that is not spiritual should allow God to clip the wings, imparting the balance of a right relationship with Him; spiritual knowledge by which he may mount up with wings as eagles.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you see the parallel here? A lot of religious folk can’t fly except in the arena of iniquitous practice that claims His name, but denies His power. Only God can change that and He will do it only if they are reconciled to Him in faith.

CONQUERING THE COSMOS

"For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world." Hebrews 4:3

A supposed contradiction in scripture presented to this writer a few years ago goes like this: *"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . ."* contrasted with *"Love not the world . . ."* 1 John. Are we to conclude then that the Bible is telling us to not love what God loves? That is contradictory. Well, think with me for a minute.

God created a cosmos (order of things). It was so perfect, so beautiful, so desirable from every viewpoint. Its zenith was manifest in Eden when the climax of creation (mankind) was made the federal head of it.

Willful transgression by the federal head, caused the entire cosmos to be cast down. From that casting down, the Lamb slain was the plan of God to redeem it unto Himself. Rev. 13:8. Thus were the works finished from the foundation of the world (casting down of the cosmos). Hebrews 4:3.

Inasmuch as mankind was made from the earth, and installed as the federal head of it, all of creation became subject to his actions. When sin entered into mankind, it changed the then known and wonderful cosmos of peace and life into a cosmos operating on the laws of sin and death. Moreover, all of creation was subjected to that disastrous decision of man, and it groans, awaiting its liberation which will occur in the final liberation of the people of God in the resurrection and rapture heralding the beginning of a new age. Romans 8:19-23.

That being said, thoughts return to the supposed contradiction, and how these thoughts apply to it. God loves the work of His hands. When all the work was finished, He beheld it, and it was very good! Gen 1:31. It is then the purpose of God to redeem His work from the "cast down" state to the fullness of His plans for it during the millennium, and on to the ultimate goal in the heaven ages to follow.

It is the cosmos that God so loved, and that Jesus came to redeem. However the cosmos that the Bible commands us to not love is the present one of sin and death. It is destined to eternal removal from the presence of God. Of it, John wrote, *"Love not the world (cosmos) neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."* 1 John 2:15.

Alas, we are all in the cosmos and doomed with it except for the success of the second Adam, Christ Jesus. Being born from above and following Him involves one in a dimension of life unknown to the present cosmos. It is an earnest of the inheritance that is to come in all of its unspeakable joy, peace and beauty. As the decision of one man cast down the cosmos and all in it, so through repentance and faith in the work of one man, Jesus, one escapes the law of sin and death, and is admitted to the wonderful law of life in the redeemed cosmos!

FOR THOUGHT: The work of redeeming the cosmos and all the people of faith within it is long, but to God it is short. So soon this entire generation will be history. What will the future hold? It all depends on whether one chooses to trust in and follow the teachings of Christ here and now. What has been your choice?

CREATION: A BIRTH FROM GOD!

"Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." Psalm 90:1-2. Thus does the Bible reaffirm creation as coming from God, but uniquely here as a birth from God. The term "brought forth" is in the ancient Hebrew language "Yalad" which means "to give birth to." Think with me for a minute or two.

In the relentless search for human mastery, science has learned that all material is made up of atoms. But we must know what the basic building block of material is. So with progress, man achieved the splitting of the atom. It was found that all atoms are made up of neutrons, protons, and electrons. But these are not the most basic components of all material. It has been more recently discovered that these are made up of smaller building blocks called quarks. But the attempts to split a quark to see what it is made of has been unsuccessful to date. Men have made vaunted progress on most all fronts in these end-time days, but they still do not know what material really is. Incidentally, all of these components of material are themselves invisible to the human eye. So, just what is material anyway? The far reaches of science must limit itself to explaining it as quarks combined to make electrons, protons, and neutrons which combine to make atoms which combine to make all known material elements. So, if all material is made from the same components how is one material expression stone, another wood, another earth, etc. Puzzles can be fun.

How much easier it is for a man of faith to simply believe the Bible! Material, whatever its basic components, came directly from God Who describes these things as a birth from Him. They express themselves in various different forms according to His command and direct will. True science is defined as "systematized facts" and the fact remains that men will not produce anything factual that contradicts the Holy Word. One wonders just how many man hours and tax dollars could be saved if men would simply admit the component of faith into their lives!

FOR THOUGHT: If mankind came from earth as the Bible states, does that give new meaning to the phrase, "Mother Earth?" Have you stopped long enough to consider yourself more than the offspring of your physical parents? God is your Father by reason of creation and never dying spirit, but earth is your mother. So just what responsibilities do think to be incumbent from this?

CRY OVER SPILLED MILK

“And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” Acts 8:18-19

The proverb is not new. You have heard it; perhaps even used it from time to time. “Don’t cry over spilled milk!” It makes sense when it references the literal action. Once milk is spilled, there is no retrieving it. But, the proverb is extended to so many different contexts in which it makes little to no sense at all. Consequently, in those metaphorical contexts the proverb should be reversed: “Cry over spilled milk!” Think with me!

From the pages of Holy Writ in Acts Chapter Eight comes the story of one Simon who was by profession a sorcerer, a resident of Samaria. In refusal to second guess the Word, let it be understood that this Simon became a believer, was baptized, and continued with Philip, beholding the miracles which were wrought. V. 13.

When Peter and John came to help the new believers, they received the Holy Spirit as the Jerusalem Church had. Simon was impressed! He wanted that power, and offered the apostles money for it. Simon spilled the milk of a heart given to profiteering in spiritual affairs; of not forsaking the old ways of a sinful world. This was a problem to new Jewish believers, and to many today. Peter rebuked him in most stern terms for the iniquitous thoughts of his heart. In other words, he was admonished to “Cry over spilled milk” in the sincerest manner of heart and mind that he might be forgiven his sins. Additionally, Simon begged the apostles to pray to the Lord for him: to help him cry over his spilled milk that he might be forgiven, and the tragedy of his “spilled milk” forever made right.

To even the most casual observer, it is evident that the milk of life that could be used to honor God, and benefit men is spilled in evil ways. Some of the more obvious of these ways is the procedure in spiritual affairs without regard to the plain teachings of the Word. This is exactly the meaning of the term “Iniquity.” When religious men deceive and lie to profiteer from Christianity or promote self, they identify with ancient Simon the sorcerer. If they are saved, it can only be hoped that they will, as he did, cry over spilled milk while the milk of life may be saved to God’s honor.

FOR THOUGHT: When symbolic milk is spilled, do you cry (verbally lament, regret, and seek to recover) over it? What if the symbolic milk is sin? How do you feel about Simon’s attitude after Peter’s stinging rebuke?

**DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE
OF
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
In Congress, July 4, 1776**

"When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.--That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness ..."

So begins that great document signed by 56 patriots of the thirteen colonies of this great country which precipitated the Revolutionary War with England, ending in the successful separation from that country, and the rise of a free and independent United States of America. Today, the actions of our forefathers of that generation are being largely ignored together with the most excellent documents they forged at tremendous cost to themselves, their families and their fortunes. It behooves every citizen to be reminded that *"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."* Prov. 14:34. Now we come to celebrate that courageous and most noble event. Let us thank our heavenly Father for the privilege of living under the best government ever conceived and employed by men, while beseeching Him to help us now in our time of increasing turbulence and trials. On a personal note on the fourth of July: have a safe and happy holiday!

FOR THOUGHT: What do you know about the Constitution of the United States of America? How long has it been since you read it? Are you depending on the good will of others to keep your rights and liberties secure? Think about it!

DIVORCE, THE DEVIL'S DOSE FROM QUACKERY CLINIC

Since the creation of the first family, the well-being of the home has been dependent upon God being recognized as its head. Too often this is not the case, and the allurements of sin pulls at the sinful nature of the flesh as a magnet pulls in attachment to iron. On this subject, Jesus said, *"And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery."* Matthew 19:9.

Nobody likes divorce! Sometimes it comes for correct, restrictive reasons, and at other times it is entered into flippantly and frivolously. In any case, Satan is pleased when a home fails. He knows the problems incumbent to the destruction of a home makes it so much easier to turn the course of life into the broad way of destruction. Today, statisticians predict that three out of every four marriages will end in divorce. The frustration, hurt, disappointment, and hardship to everyone involved by that action often signals the end of Christian discipleship. It should not, but it often does. Thank God for those who remain faithful to serve Him.

God created three institutions among men: the home, the government, and the church. All three institutions do well for themselves, and for the honor of God when He is recognized as the final authority. So why do not these institutions honor God and thrive? Comments here are restricted to the home, but it is the backbone of the other two. When the home does well, so do the other two.

Too many times marriages are made in sexual attraction instead of true love. Moreover, forgetting God allows temptations to claim control of life, subjecting one to the allurements of money and marital infidelity. Even the demise of the honeymoon can reveal personalities are not compatible as first thought.

Most usually, the will of God is not sought in family troubles (it takes two) and the ease of legal divorcement is seized. It would be good if divorce were never spoken or entertained in the mind, and instead God's will sought out. But the sinful world makes it easy, and the devil says sure, go ahead. It is the devil's dose from quackery clinic. Couples should honor God, study the Bible and pray. That way, together they could stay! No one escapes the trials of temptation and challenge, but many overcome them. However, victory is not in us, but in Him!

FOR THOUGHT: If you are married, did you think the vow of "For better or worse," was simply, poetically appropriated for the moment? "Better" is at the marriage altar. "Worse" will definitely come. If you are single, think long and hard about the lifetime commitment marriage brings, and in Christ, even the "Worse" may be made a cherished blessing. In Him there is staying power!

DOES THE MAYFLOWER LIVE ON?

"And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

John 11:26

The Mayflower, as early history students learn, brought some of the first pilgrims to America. It returned to England and was decommissioned in the 1620s. How long it sat before being auctioned off as scrap is not known, but it has been featured in respectable magazines such as National Geographic and others as presently a barn in Jordans, England, outside London.

It was my privilege to visit that place where there is also a cemetery hosting the grave of William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania. While enjoying tea and crumpets, I could not help but notice the resemblance of a large barn-like structure to an inverted ship. Upon inquiry, I was told that it was the Mayflower. Asking how this could possibly be, I was told that the lack of wood in England made decommissioned ships valuable as building material. So the ship was bought at auction, disassembled, then reassembled upside down as a barn structure. A visit to the inside was fascinating.

In the United States, most anything that is a century old is considered old, but in England hardly anything is considered old unless it exceeds four to five hundred years of existence. I was privileged to stay in a hotel, and dine in a banquet room that dates back to the 1200s. A.D. The antiquity of the room was apparent, and hosted an aroma of age, but the large timbers were quite structurally sound.

So, perhaps the Mayflower lives on as a useful structure, but not as originally intended. I was reminded that unlike the Mayflower the ship of life has deposited Christians as pilgrims in a Christ-rejecting world. However we will live on in Christ Jesus, not downgraded, but upgraded: mortality swallowed up of immortality. Praises be to the Lord Jesus Christ Who took our dross, and Who made His own righteousness available by faith to all who receive Him! 2 Cor. 5:21 states it this way, *"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."*

FOR THOUGHT: Do you realize that unlike the Mayflower, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ continues to sail the seas of life after some 2,000 years? Moreover, it is still true to its purpose, not perverted, except as some have willingly left the faith once delivered to the saints. Have you found that "Ship of Zion?" Are you an active part of it?

DRINKING FROM MY BEER

Wait! Please read the story before calling for the tar and feathers! It is indeed interesting to note the aurora of meanings surrounding words whose basic definition is unknown to us. A typical example are the words “beer” and “Beersheba.” “Beersheba” has a sort of romantic ring to it, and one may imagine some great and noble thing is alluded to by the compound word.

However, the word “beer” is actually a Hebrew word, hijacked by breweries, and inserted into the English language bodily (transliteration). The Hebrew Word actually translates as “well” as in a well of water, and places make or fermented brew may be referenced as “watering holes.” Of course, such perverted usage of terms is clearly understood in that context as having nothing to do with plain and simple water.

The word “Sheba” is the Hebrew word for the cardinal number “seven.” So, one may wonder just how the cardinal number seven came to be joined to the word for “well” to create “Beersheba” (well of seven). Here is an interesting story. There was controversy over the ownership of a well of water that Abraham laid claim to as having actually dug. In a covenant of peace with the inhabitants of that country Abraham gave their prince seven ewe lambs as the token of a covenant made between them that the well belonged to Abraham. Hence it is the well that was redeemed by a “gift of seven” lambs. Out of that context, Abraham called the place “Beersheba” (Well of Seven).

Now read the story in Genesis 21, and you will never forget the history of Beersheba. That place still exists to this day. It is controlled by descendants of Ishmael, and is a town called Hebron. Here is Beersheba, and also the cave of Machpelah which was the burying place of Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.,

Far from being boring, aloof, and uninteresting, the Bible abounds with mountains of fascinating information to bless the lives of all who invest a little time and energy into it. The Old Testament truly is a treasure house of “Hebrew Honey.”

FOR THOUGHT: Do you have a few nuggets of understanding from the Bible that bring you joy, and delight as you share them with others? The Bible is a repository of such, just awaiting discovery by the believer. Try it! You will like it!

DRIVING THE TICK-TOCK

"The haters of the Lord should have submitted themselves unto him: but their time should have endured for ever." Psalm 81:15.

Perhaps it was a small, wind-up alarm clock placed on a nightstand near the bed, or a larger wall mounted clock that struck the hour. It may have been the cherished grandfather clock whose ticking and tocking dominated the quietness until the hour chimes sounded, the purpose in them all was to accurately measure time, and faithfully transmit that measure to people preoccupied with other things.

Their sound was a constant reminder of the steadfast, unalterable passage of time. Each tiny measure seemed to tick "Now-gone, Now-gone."

My generation is the last to have experienced the familiar tick-tock from infancy to adulthood. The sound was often motivational. At other times it conveyed comfort, and security as it overrode the anxiety of insomnia with the assurance that all is well and proceeding as normal. Even a puppy being weaned from its mother would cease its night time whimpering and sleep soundly if a ticking clock were wrapped and placed in its bed to mimic the heartbeat of another so close.

In the throes of nostalgia, it truly seems something dear was lost when the old, faithful instruments of tick-tock gave way to the silent digital instruments that simply produced a readout of the more precise time of day. Thus the colloquialism of "what makes you tick" alludes to the old tick-tock of mechanical time clocks. Like the ticking and tocking of the clocks, there is a ticking and tocking of life. It reveals purpose. Clocks had a simple, but specific purpose to which they were limited and largely faithful, but with people the ticking and tocking is widely varied, giving rise to the curious inquiry: "What makes you tick?"

Aside from the commonality of providing for home, offspring, and dedication to the tasks necessary to life commensurate with one's generation, "What really makes you tick?" Is it the acquisition of power, wealth, popularity or other mundane things destined to pass away? Such pursuits are attached to losers whose "Mainspring" of life has been reprogrammed by the forces of evil away from the pursuit and enjoyment of truth that comes from the Creator.

In other terms, unlike people, it is always the potter, not the vessel who decides which lump of clay will be preserved as useful. Therefore, the vessels of humanity need to know this about their Creator: it is the very glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honor of kings is to search it out. Prov. 25:2. It follows then that all those who would be a preserved vessel of truth must return to the original programming of the Creator through the only channel He prepared for them: repentance from sin and faith in Christ Jesus. That is the foundational programming that allows the pursuit, or the "tick-tock," of life to fulfill creation's purpose.

After all, when life is soon over, all one may take into the next dimension is what he has become on earth: that is what he truly believes, and one can not believe what he does not know. What then are you pursuing? What is it that is driving the "tick-tock" of your life?

FOR THOUGHT? Has this article succeeded in drawing attention to a vision of life seldom considered? How will you answer the last question of the article? Will you make changes in your pursuits today?

DUST ON THE BIBLE

"And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it." 2 Kings 22:8.

Many years ago, a country singer recorded a song that was often used on radio programs such as the Grand Ole Opry and others. The lyrics went something like this: *"Dust on the Bible, dust on God's Holy Word; words of all the prophets and the sayings of our Lord. Of all the other books you'll find, there is none salvation whole; get the dust off the Bible and redeem your poor soul."*

Nothing has changed. Herein is the condemnation, Jesus taught us, that light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light. Many families have a private library of books of fiction and nonfiction writers on topics of interest to them, yet they remain ignorant of the words of light and of life. There is no logic to this. It is just the reality of sin dominating the lives of both saved and lost sinners.

Some time ago, this writer was preaching on this topic. The statement was made that some people might be surprised if they open their Bible: a WWII Savings Bond might fall out. A dear lady in our church got to thinking about several Bibles she possessed that once belonged to departed relatives. She went home and began thumbing through them. In one of them a WWII Savings Bond fell out. She brought it to church to show to me. We had a good laugh. It was the first time I had seen one of those in over 60 years.

Everyone should understand that God did not give him the Bible as a repository of valuable papers or of vital statistics of family members. It was given for the vital well-being of all who possess it, and possessing a copy carries with it an awesome responsibility for which account will definitely be given when each one stands before Jesus.

I picked up a book to read a few months ago. In the initial pages there was a page entitled "Introduction" then in parenthesis were the words (to be read). That is the purpose of the 66 books of the Holy Bible. Everyone should read them, even preachers and Sunday school teachers. Exposing the mind to the Holy, infallible Word gives the Holy Spirit something to work with in aiding our spiritual growth toward maturity. I believe no one should remain ignorant of the Word of his Creator Whom he is soon destined to meet.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you own a copy of the Bible? Are you fully aware that one day, sooner than you think, you must give an account of your knowledge of its content? Starting right now, will you give some time to reading the Bible each day?

DYING, THOU SHALT SURELY DIE

The phrase, "Dying, thou shalt surely die" is a literal translation of the Hebrew words denoting the penalty for eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis 2:17. The serpent capitalized on the words, assuring Mother Eve that she would not immediately fall down dead from eating of the forbidden fruit. Additionally, on the tree was good food to be had and knowledge to be gained. Of course, he purposely did not reveal that unlike God, she would not be able to choose the good and shun the evil. What subtlety was in his lies!

So, having sin incorporated into the basic makeup of the species, it is universally, by heredity, appointed unto men once to die. Hebrews 9:27. Is there anyone who could successfully argue against this consistent process? Every hospital testifies that men get sick and die. Every cemetery shouts that it is appointed unto men once to die. Every undertaking establishment says that it is appointed unto men once to die. Old age, and the loss of mental acumen bears witness that it is appointed unto men once to die, so death reigns on planet Earth without respect for persons. The Bible is plain in declaring that the last enemy of mankind to be destroyed will be death. 1 Cor. 15:26.

But GOOD NEWS! For those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, death has indeed been destroyed as the common enemy. Jesus soundly defeated it on the cross long, long ago. He not only defeated it, He made it to lay down at our feet and patiently wait for the nod of God to become our transport from the terrestrial to the celestial.

Consequently, there is no fear of the grim reaper in the eternally young heart of the redeemed. Neither is it waited upon with dread. Conversely, the Father of Spirits is fellowshiped in increasing intensity in the full realization that should the Lord Jesus not appear bodily in His glorious second coming, the hideous monster of death will become a limousine to carry us over into the higher dimension in style to the shout of throngs of awaiting saints, constituting the grandest welcoming committee imaginable. Moreover, in their midst is the blessed Son of God by whose Word, Work, and Authority we enter that heavenly home.

But until then, sin continues to raise its ugly head, and we do what we would not. Thus does the reality of its penalty exercise itself in all of us: "Dying, thou shalt surely die."

FOR THOUGHT: How important it is to understand the triune composition of every person. It is the spirit of a person that is initially saved by faith in Christ Jesus. The mind is saved by being renewed through the Word. But the body will not experience salvation until the rapture and resurrection. Until then, it must die, but death is often a natural process.

EASTER THOUGHTS

Why Easter? The question will leave one exhausted and confused by myriad explanations. Let's take a condensed look.

First, the name is explored. "Easter" is of various origins including Anglo-Saxon, German, and Latin. It alludes to the direction: east. In earlier times the general populace much more closely observed the sun and moon than people do today. The world was basically agricultural of necessity; hence, the importance of the certainty of planting time. It was after the northern, spring equinox. The sun determined that. It means that precise day when the day and the night are exactly the same length, so the rising of the sun at a precise point on the horizon signaled the change from winter to spring.

Additionally, there were numerous mythological gods with names close to the word "Easter." In many segments of the world they were worshipped as the gods, goddesses of fertility and spring; the word is used one time in the Bible as a mistranslation of the word "Passover."

Secondly, how is Easter Sunday determined? It is the first Sunday, following the first full moon following the northern spring equinox. That formula lends credence to its ancient origin being attached to paganism and agriculture rather than a specific time commemorating the resurrection of Jesus like His birth being commemorated on a specific date, Dec. 25th.

Thirdly, what does it mean to us today? In the "Christian" world it is arguably the holiest of all holidays, commemorating the resurrection of Jesus. But to a lesser number of true Christians who are stricter Bible believers, every Sunday is rightfully a commemoration of Jesus' resurrection. They are mindful of what Paul said to the churches of Galatia in 4:10-11.

Fourthly, did Jesus actually arise on the first day of the week? He did! But it must be remembered that Jewish days are counted from six o'clock to six o'clock p.m. to p.m., which almost always genders the question of what day He was crucified. Doubtless, it was anytime following six o'clock Saturday evening (dawning of the next day). Count backward from there to include three days and three nights, and you will have the answer.

While we may rightfully lament the silliness of a rabbit that lays colored eggs being emblematic of Easter to a lot of folks, I do hope and pray that the observance of the day will bring to their consciousness the real story of a crucified and risen Savior, and the eternal life to be had in Him through repentance and faith.

FOR THOUGHT: Now that you know just how Easter is determined on the Calendar, do you think it is a carry-over from earlier, agricultural times? Do you understand why stricter Bible believing Christians do not get too excited over the holiday, and insist every first day of the week is the Christian Easter?

ECCUMENISM: TWO VIEWPOINTS

“Eccumenism,” what is it, anyway? The word is basically Latin, and means “The whole world” according to several dictionaries. Within the Christian context, it means the idea and/or the movement to bring all of the Christian churches together as one. Protestants see this as universal, and Catholics largely see this as persuading all churches to return to the Catholic fold from which they themselves went astray. Baptists know that Catholics originated by departing from them. They see it as rank heresy; religious baloney, to be avoided at all cost.

The history of ecumenism is interesting, but it is bad. The first ecumenical movement succeeded in society at large in the days of Noah. God destroyed the entire world as a result (except for those on the Ark, of course). But men are sinful, fleshly, and do not learn spiritual truth as those things can only be understood by spiritual people. So, time found the whole populated world in another ecumenical movement at the Tower of Babel. To break it up, God created languages, and the population was segregated to the language they could understand. The language and scattering of the people accordingly created an effective separation which has served well until recent times.

Today, modern technology has all but eliminated the barrier of language. Modern transportation allows men to be global in bodily presence. Communications are global and instant and for many years world leaders have been working consistently on a “New World (ecumenical) Order.” It is intended to be ecumenical politically, economically, and religiously. As nations march steadily onward toward that goal purported to be the apex of man’s existence, but apart from his Creator. Thus, the very idea of individualism and exceptionalism is both abandoned and viewed as antithetical to the desired outcome.

All of this does not bode well for the nations, but it is their determined goal. Still the Creator’s clarion call to all who will hear Him is to *“come out from among them and be ye separate saith the Lord.”* 2 Cor. 6:17. Baptist churches stand or fall on their understanding and treatment of the Word. For them ecumenism offers nothing to gain, and everything to lose. They have stood on God’s truth while Catholic, Protestant, and Neo-protestants left them to go the way of fleshly religion. Doubtless, it will be increasingly harder to stand alone, but by the grace of God some will.

FOR THOUGHT: Presently, the world at large is pulling out all stops to become one. Ecumenism demands not only the union of many, but the abandonment of principles that separate people. Do you think Christianity has anything to gain, but everything to lose in being at one with the world and its social religions? Why?

EDUCATED BEYOND INTELLIGENCE

An intellectual scholar was once described in homespun wisdom as “being educated beyond his intelligence.” Of course, there is humor in the description, but beyond that, it seems there is also some sobering truth. For some, it appears that the more educated they become, the more they appear to be ignorant of what is truly important in life.

On the other hand, those hearing the words of the truly wise man, Solomon, will have their feet firmly established in true wisdom. He said, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Proverbs 1:7. Doubtless, the wise man had listened well to his father, King David, who described those who deny their maker in favor of preposterous theories in these words, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God...” Psalm 14:1. The practicality of truth over theory is nicely summed up in the little poem below”

EVOLUTION

Scholars say mankind is a product of
evolution, Citing many textbooks for their
conclusion. they say man is a descendant of
the ape,
That there is no Heaven,; no pearly gate.

But God created Earth, and God created Man,
Why is this so hard for them to understand?

Scholars say mankind is a product of evolution,
And this muddled thinking has led to confusion.
Maybe man does act like a monkey sometimes,
But it's God's help he seeks when in a bind.

—Ellen Bailey

FOR THOUGHT: Educational degrees are desirable, but how do they contrast with understanding and wisdom? Would not both be more ideal? Have you known someone whom you thought was educated beyond his intelligence because common sense was absent?

EXCEPT THESE BONDS!

“And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.” Acts 26:29

A tree sawn down will reveal a number of rings from bark to core. These testify to the age of the tree, and often more: its nutrient supply, damage by storms, etc. to the studied eye. Experience and accrued wisdom likewise tell the story of human life. It has been said that a person is the sum total of life experiences. However, many people spend a lifetime attempting to shortcut or circumvent the necessary experiences to arrive at a desired goal. For instance, this writer has had numerous people over the years to say, “I would give a thousand dollars to be able to play the piano as your daughter does.” The common reply is: “Cheapskate!” It cost a lot more than that over the years plus the time and practice she invested. Worthwhile things have their price.

The apostle Paul was a highly educated, zealously dedicated Jew, but far from God's grace, will, and way. But, at the time he spoke the words of Acts 26:29 before King Agrippa, his life had been transformed 180 degrees. Just think of some of the things that had happened to him. He was shown such marvelous, heavenly things that he could not reveal. He was stricken blind on the road to Damascus; shunned by other believers; stoned and thrown in a ditch as dead; run out of various towns; in perils of life often; beaten and imprisoned. These things alone did not bring him to the spiritual zenith of life, but they did help to solidify and verify the great truths that God revealed to him as he experienced these things.

Accordingly, he could wish that all men were altogether as he, except the bonds. The songwriter penned: “Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease while others fought to win the prize and sailed through bloody seas?” The mature, well-seasoned saint will bear in his life the marks of the Lord Jesus. Faith in the person, words, and works of our Lord is not just good preaching; it is the essence of life well lived, and rewardable at the end of the way! An interesting and thought provoking question is: do you recoil or welcome Paul's wishes for you?

FOR THOUGHT A good question is: How have you come to appreciate the great truths of God in your life? Have there been disappointments, heartaches, life-threatening situations that made the promises and hope real and solid in your life? There is no shortcut for what these things bring in the journey of life.

EXTRATERRESTRIAL LOVE AND YOU

News! News! Just what is news? If a dog bites a man, it is not news. However, if a man bites a dog, now that is news! So, it is the unusual, unique, out of the ordinary occurrence that is considered news. In modern society most news is bad news, but there is news that is good beyond words. We celebrate it all year, but especially now.

The Almighty, Creator God of heaven and earth, and all therein, elected to become one of us: the Creator became the created. He lived a sinless life as a God-filled human, fulfilled the humanly impossible law of Moses; paid the penalty of sin for every repentant person by His own death on the cross, and arose again to eternal glory. He remains a story far above the rise and fall of empires or any works of noble and talented men. It is simply the greatest story ever told, or ever will be told. His is the story of righteous love and you! Every human comes from His hand, and bears the image of the Triune God. As a result, His love for you is gigantic!

In addition to Holy Writ, even common sense reasoning underscores this logical conclusion: if God loved you enough to leave heaven, and endure those things which He despised (Heb. 12:1) how ought every one of us to be quick to respond to His love in repentance, faith, open, and joyful acceptance of what He has done, and what He is ready to do with us. Here, my friend is the very heart of the meaning of Christmas. This is why the greatest story ever told was, and is, told!

Oh, the wonder of the Son of God being given to us! It means: the holy gift of forgiveness, life, gladness, and joy to the receiving heart! It is said of our Lord Jesus, He had no servants, Yet they called Him Master; Had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher; had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer; had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today. Feel honored to know and to serve such an altogether marvelous and loving Savior.

This is why the greatest story ever told was, and is, told! Furthermore, the wonder of the meaning of this greatest story is embodied in the deep, and most often misunderstood, seasonal greeting: "Merry Christmas!"

FOR THOUGHT: Has the story of Christmas become trite to you? If yes, could it be that focus is on the words of the story and not the reality that the meaning of the words convey? What in the universe could compare with the story of Jesus? What?

FAINTHEARTED IS NOT A WINNER

“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

Galatians 6:9

It was 1950. I was eleven years old and a new product had begun to sweep the country.....HAD-A-COL: guaranteed to invigorate seniors with vim, vigor, and vitality! To promote the product the company advertised a “FREE” movie at MALCO Theater downtown. Actually the admission price was one box top from a purchase of HAD-A-COL. Furthermore, the kid that collected the most box tops would win a brand new Schwinn 26” bicycle.

Oh, how I wanted that bicycle! But, I figured, what’s the use. I lived in a very tiny community. While we had a lot of seniors, I just knew that the kids who lived in town would collect box tops by the bushel. So, I gave up before I started.

On movie day, I proudly produced my box top for admission, and enjoyed an exciting movie on the big silver screen. I think it was Hop-a-long Cassidy, Tim McCoy, Lash LaRue or some other childhood hero of the west.

When the movie was over, all the lights came on. It was time to determine who would get the new Cadillac of bicycles.....the sleek, new Schwinn. The person in charge started by asking who had collected 100 or more box tops. Holding my breath, I looked all around. In the theater filled with kids, not a single hand went up. So, the numbers called out got lower and lower. Finally the question: Who has ten box tops? One child raised his hand then made his way to the front. He won the bicycle with just ten box tops!!! I simply COULD NOT BELIEVE IT! I had no doubt at all that I could have gotten 25! Well, that was more than a half century ago, but I have never forgotten it. Never give up before you start. Always do the best you can do, and great things may happen. One thing is certain: faint-hearted is a loser, not a winner!

Now, who is it that you have neglected to witness to, thinking it would do no good anyway? This may very well be the time a precious, lost soul enters heaven’s doors. How would that make you feel?

FOR THOUGHT: Does Galatians 6:9 motivate you to keep on keeping on for the Lord? It is certain that there will be no reaping of reward if we are content to faint and fall by the wayside. It should always be remembered that a witness you thought was rejected actually bore fruit years in advance. God uses things we see and hear for years into the future.

FASTING: IS IT A RIGHT THING FOR OUR TIME?

In some circles, much is made of modern-day fasting as a New Testament doctrine for Christian disciples. Due to the interest of some, the following is offered. Please think with me!

Certainly, the topic has not escaped its lighthearted comments. Someone said, "I fast every night, and the first thing in the morning I break-fast." Still others allude to it frivolously within a religious context, giving up one or two choice foods for a brief period mainly because their church or group has agreed to do this without even a clear reason why, but every effort is made to give it public notice.

Still, more is made of fasting in the Old Testament than in the New. Religious leaders of the Old Testament loved to engage in a sort of fasting, and they made sure everyone knew it by their grimaced appearance. Jesus did not speak kindly about that. Matt. 6:16-18. Moreover, the Pharisees criticized the disciples of Jesus because they did not fast. *"Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast."* Matt. 9:14-15

Following the ascension of Jesus, the topic is seldom mentioned in the scriptures. Perhaps the most notable reference is in I Corinthians 7:5 where it is mentioned as an appropriate reason for couples to abstain from conjugal relationships for a short time. However, it is notable that both here and elsewhere, voluntary fasting is intricately associated with prayer. In prayer, one would simultaneously abstain from the cravings of the flesh to better discipline himself in the things of God.

Foot-washing was a good thing in New Testament times, too. Incidentally, it is recommended today, but not as a religious practice. Its lesson of personal humility is to characterize brethren throughout the age. Similarly, fasting was not done to get the attention of God, but to condition the soul through prayer to walk closer to God. It is infinitely more important how much closet prayer time is spent rather than fasting time. Furthermore, the point is that if one is given to prayer, there will be times when he will fast through meal time to continue his supplications to the Lord. Additionally, like prayer; fasting is a very private, personal thing that other people have no business knowing about. So, proper fasting has its place, but to engage in it as a stand-alone, virtually public, religious practice is vain, if not hypocritical.

FOR THOUGHT: Are you acquainted with instances in the New Testament where people were given to fasting? Why were they doing it? Is it not always associated with a specific, important purpose? Which do you think to be more important, fasting or praying? Why?

FIRST DENTAL HYGIENIST

Dental Hygienists may be glad to learn that theirs is a profession of antiquity. Most would think it a fairly new thing of the last century or so. As a matter of fact, God Himself was the first dental hygienist. Think with me a moment.

When the Hebrews were following the pillar of cloud by day, and the pillar of fire by night in the long trek from Egyptian bondage to the Promised Land, they were mightily blessed of the Lord. He dropped bread on them every night except the Sabbath eve; provided them with water in the desert; kept them in clothing, and shoes that simply would not wear out, etc.

But, they began to complain because of the light bread, which, though tasty, they had come to disdain. So, they lamented over the leeks, onions, melons, and fleshpots they had in Egypt, but here all they had was light bread. Their cry became "give us flesh to eat!"

God gave them flesh, and He also smote them while the flesh was in their mouth, Numbers 11. Much later, in their backslidden condition, the Lord dealt with them differently. The people were exposed to a dental cleaning. This is underscored by the prophet Amos who cried out against the children of Israel in these words: *"And I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and want of bread in all your places: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."* Amos 4:6.

So, the Loving God Who dealt with them severely in the wilderness wanderings to fill their teeth with flesh, also provided them with cleanness of teeth (famine), but they still did not turn to the Lord from their sinful ways. It is descriptive of a condition afflicting a lot of folk nowadays.

It seems people want the prayers of Christians when they are ill, but they do not want healing in order to serve God, they want it so they can continue their sinful lifestyle. Should they have a wreck in their automobile, they will seek a safer, more indestructible car rather than humbly submit to God's working in their life. Should they have a blowout, they will not reckon with their actions, but simply seek blowout proof tires. Such is the status of a large percentage of what is called Christianity in general, and Baptists in particular.

There is a saying that those who forget history are doomed to relive it. Remember, the cleanness of teeth that the Lord provided His people was altogether good, but not to be desired. Those who are wise recall I Cor. 10 in which it is expressly stated that all those things that happened to Israel are recorded for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world are come.

It is obviously better for every Christian to keep his teeth (heart) clean lest a visit to the first dental hygienist be in order.

FOR THOUGHT: What diet are you feeding your never-dying soul? Have you abandoned the precious Word of God for the exciting, fleshly ways of the world? If so, what do you think that will ultimately bring you?

FOREMAN'S FABLES

"To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you." I Corinthians 9:22-23.

When I entered Missionary Baptist Seminary in the late 1950s, Dr. L. D. Foreman, President of the school, taught the course: Bible in Eight Ages. It was a real eye-opener, and most helpful to students to grasp the overall outline of the Bible presentation of times and events. Foreman had a lot of select stories designed to inspire students to dedication, and to achieve their highest potential in the ministry. This is one of them.

Once there was a man who loved to farm. He was really good at raising abundant crops of various vegetables that could bless multitudes of folk in faraway places. But, his interest ended at hands-on farming. Of course, he had an unsteady two-wheel cart on which he would load as many vegetables as it would hold, and painfully take them to town to sell to eager customers. Because of his inability to transport his goods effectively, most of the vegetables lay on the ground and soon rotted. However, that did not bother the farmer. He could hardly wait to till the soil again and raise still more luscious vegetables.

Now what the farmer needed was a spur to the railroad and some refrigerated cars to transport his vegetables far and wide. But, that never was an interest to him. He just wanted to till the soil and raise more vegetables.

The moral of the story is this: as you gain information and the ability to study with specific objectives in mind, you will rejoice in what you continue to learn, and produce from the Word. Do not be content with that alone. What you also need is an appropriate vehicle to deliver what you learn to others who eagerly wait for the benefit of your study. English is that vehicle. Learn vocabulary! Learn grammar! Learn to spell! Learn to speak effectively to college educated folk as well those who lack education. Otherwise your ministry will be greatly limited for lack of effective transport.

Dr. Foreman was right, of course, but his fable applies across the board to all of God's people, not just to ministers. We should study to show ourselves approved unto God as a workman who needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth. We should also diligently study to have the ability to convey these great truths in an acceptable manner to others about us.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you agree that poor speakers succeed far less than excellent speakers given that all other things are equal? Do you learn new words each week to give you more options in framing your witness?

FRANCOIS MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH 169TH ANNIVERSARY HOMECOMING

Today our church celebrates its 169th year of service to our Lord Jesus Christ. The church was begun in 1848 on this very plot of ground given for this purpose by the Benjamin Clardy Family. The raw land was cleared by slave labor. It is interesting to note the environment of the times when our church came into existence in 1848.

Arkansas was only 12 years old.

The American Civil War was yet another twelve years away.

Abe Lincoln was a youngster living in a log cabin in Illinois.

All transportation was animal drawn except for early steam engine trains.

There were no roads other than wagon trails.

There was no electricity.

All lighting was by candle or kerosene lamp. The incandescent light bulb was not invented until 1880, and was slow to catch on.

There was no radio

There was no television

There was no telephone

There was no automobile

There was no airplane.

There was no indoor plumbing

There was no air conditioning.

There were no antibiotic medicines

There were no calculators.

There were no computers.

There was no refrigeration

There were no McDonalds or KFC.

There was no pizza

There were not a hundred other things that are taken for granted today.

There were hearty pioneers.

There were God's people, His churches, and ministers.

There were protracted revival meetings, lots of folks saved, and baptized.

There were a few Missionary Baptist Churches in Arkansas, and in 1848 there was Francois.

Thank God for our fathers, and for all who journeyed with her through these years.

FOR THOUGHT: The woods remain full of associational Missionary Baptist Churches. Some of them predate statehood of our state. They are the remnant of Anabaptists who came to the new world, and by the grace of God prospered greatly, they multiplied, and they remain as Baptists were in apostolic days. Do you know the origin and history of the church of your membership?

FREEDOM INCLUDES RISK

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool.

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental.

To reach for another is to risk
involvement.

To expose your feelings is to risk exposing your true self.

To love is to risk not being loved in return.

To live is to risk dying.

To trust is to risk betrayal.

To try is to risk failure.

But risks must be taken, because the greatest hazard in your life is to risk nothing.

If you risk nothing, then you shall do nothing, have nothing, BE nothing.

You might avoid suffering and sorrow for a time,

But you cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, or live.

Chained by a fearful attitude, you become a slave.

You forfeit your freedom.

Only a person who risks is truly free.

——Anon

FOR THOUGHT: Some of the most thought provocative lines of literature are those framed in poetry. How do you feel about this poem? Do you agree with the unknown author? Why?

GE AND COSMOS

It is the purpose of this article to enhance the knowledge of several folks with a distinction, and contrast of the words “Ge” and “cosmos.” First of all, the term “Ge” is not to be confused as the opposite of “Haw” as a directional command to a farm animal. Additionally, it is not to be confused with a slang expression of the South as in “Geeminee or geewhiz.” But more to the point, it is not to be confused with “Cosmos.” Of course, here the phonetics are quite different, but the idea still gets muddled. Speaking of muddled, some minds may be muddled already, but bear with me.

In the Bible, the word “world” is most often used as the translation of “cosmos.” This is proper, but herein is also the problem. Too many students tend to think of the “world” as the planet on which we live. That is an incorrect understanding. The ancient Greek word “cosmos” references a working system designed to produce predictable results. Hence the universe of planetary bodies is referred to as a cosmos as it is a definite, predictable working pattern. The order of the world of men is a cosmos because it is framed on the predictable order of sin and death. A clock is a cosmos since it is a working system designed to produce predictable results. Oh, yes, they call that stuff women use to make themselves pretty “cosmetics.” That, too, is from cosmos because it transforms a female from an ordinary human being to a predictable system designed to attract the opposite sex. (now, I am going to get it). Summation: “world” is from “Cosmos.” It designates a system. It is not a designation of the planet earth in the context of creation.

Of course, there is a term designating the planet. It is “Ge.” Furthermore, that root word in its expansion gives us such words as “geology, geography, geometry, geophysics, Georgia,” etc., all having to do with physiology of the planet.

Being discriminatory with words goes a long way toward eliminating confusion of ideas. It helps the speaker to think more precisely, and it helps the audience to infer more properly what exactly has been implied, connoted, or denoted. Most all of us would profit from a review of etymology (a study of root words, prefixes and suffixes). It would most likely stoke our love for our mother tongue as well as open pleasurable avenues of ideas contained therein which may have never been entertained previously. Well, I had hoped this article would be somewhat of a cosmos, but it seems that all I can say is “Gee.”

FOR THOUGHT: Did this article help you to learn anything? With a proper understanding of words, these two words, does that alter your thinking on several passages of scripture?

GENTLE: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE "BE"

Gentleness in all of God's people is much set by in Holy Writ, both in admonition, and in examples set by Paul and other inspired writers. Paul said on one occasion, *"And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,"* 2 Timothy 2:4. Let's think about that for a brief moment!

As others, Christians also display a variety of attitudes, but they have one wonderful attitude that the world cannot possess. It is the attitude of Christ Jesus. Biblical examples and admonitions abound of less than desirable attitudes because the sin nature is not removed in spiritual salvation. It is left as the objective goal to conquer. One indignant minister of the cowboy mentality purportedly studied to "skin the sheep of his flock." Fortunately, he was reminded that sheep may be fleeced many times, but skinned only once. How much better then should all of God's people have the attitude of a loving, under-shepherd of His sheep rather than that of a roughshod cowboy!

The apostle Paul reminded the church at Corinth, and the church at Thessalonica that they were gentle among them, even as a nurse cherishes her children. He also taught the churches of Galatia that gentleness was very much a part of the fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5:22. One of the highest compliments that may be paid to a man is that he be known and called a gentleman. Such mildness and sensitivity to others is far from weakness, but indicates great strength of character. It also denotes an ability to stand fast for that which is right and good without lashing out in verbal disparagements of the character of others even if it seems they deserve such.

Perhaps the book of James is perceived as the most down to earth, pointedly expressed book of the New Testament. Yet James goes on to tell all who take the name of the Lord Jesus as a Christian that, *"... the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."* James 3: 17.

So, in all the dealings one has with others, earnest prayer is in order that above the myriad of possible attitudes, gentleness might prevail. Be gentle: it is an important Bible "Be"

FOR THOUGHT: Have you ever wanted to give someone a piece of your mind, but thought better of it and showed Christian gentleness? How did that make you feel? Do you win a friend which you could have easily lost? WDJD! What did Jesus do?

GIVE ME CHILDREN, OR ELSE I DIE!

"And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die." Gen. 30:1

Many years ago, my good friend and mentor, Dr. R. T. Perritt wrote a book entitled, **KINDLING FIRES FOR CHURCH GROWTH**. As the title would suggest, the chapters of the book were devoted to encouragement for the Lord's people to seek growth both spiritually and numerically in the churches.

The text verse above, reveals an extremely deep desire to fulfill one's purpose in life. For Rachel, the wife of choice of Jacob, it was to bear children. As that scenario may be extrapolated into the present, spiritual realm, it is realized that the churches of the Lord have purpose to fulfill. They realize that unless they are given spiritual children to carry on the great work of Christ's commission to them, they will soon become extinct. Subsequently, the cry of Rachel "...else I die." will become a reality for the churches.

The anguish of Rachel was heightened by others in the extended family bearing children. In the same manner, churches that are not growing spiritually and numerically see yet others who may not be of the "faith once delivered to the saints" growing numerically can be tempted to reach beyond biblical boundaries to incorporate unqualified members into their fold. That may produce a temporary sense of well-being, but any growth in the Lord's churches, not accomplished His way not only fails to help, it can actually hasten the spiritual death of that body.

As the cry of Rachel was to her husband, so let the cry of God's people be unto Him Who is able to give the proper increase. Let us be done with seeking to do the work that only God can do, and increase efforts in the work He gave us to do. Let us pray earnestly! Let us witness genuinely! Let us live honestly, and enthusiastically according to the hope that lies in our hearts. Truly, we can plant the seed. We can water that which is planted, but it is God Who gives the increase. Thus to the Lord of harvest let us cry, "Give us children, or else we die." That is the increase that will last.

FOR THOUGHT: Should a church be concerned with adding to its membership without first making Rachel's cry to the Lord of the church? To whom should Christians look for blessings? Do you think it is easy to put the power of God in the background of church activities? What do you think will be the result of such actions?

GO UP, BALD HEAD, GO UP!

Once disdained, or at least recognized as cause for offense: sarcasm, ridicule, fleshly humor at another's expense are all elevated to be acceptable humor in the modern, more degenerate society. Furthermore, these things are often drawing cards in commercial competition ever vying for a few moments' attention from consumers seen as potential patrons.

What was taboo, and quickly rejected by generations gone by, seems to have found new favor in an "enlightened generation" free from the protocols and civilities of the past. So deeply ingrained is this attitude that some younger ones are often made to wonder at those earlier restraints, and to make fun of anyone whose deportment matches those of yesteryear. This is not a compliment, but more of a disparagement. Think with me about a peculiar incident of long ago.

The Old Testament prophet Elisha was an understudy of the prophet Elijah. Elisha wanted a double portion of the spirit that rested on Elijah, and was told it would be so, if he saw him when the Lord took him up. It happened! 2 Kings 2. A chariot of fire took Elijah up that he did not see death. Elisha picked up Elijah's mantle and began to work wondrous deeds. Of course, this vastly unusual incident was noised far and wide in Israel.

It came to pass that in Elisha's travels, some children saw him and began to shout tauntingly: "Go up thou bald head, go up!" They were children! Doubtless they had heard disparaging statements from their parents and/or other adults of a cynical nature. So, they made fun of the work of the Lord that had occurred, and of the prophet Elisha. Under the curse of the prophet, two bears ran out of the woods, and tore up 42 of them for their sacrilege "fun" made of God's work and God's prophet. Read it! 2 Kings 2.

Modern man should give tremendous pause to this historic incident. Above all, DO NOT JUDGE GOD, YOU ARE NOT QUALIFIED! God called those children home for an act that probably lies at the feet of their disrespectful parents. Make of the incident what you will, it must be understood that God does not take lightly to sinners poking fun, and speaking disparagingly of His Mighty will, work, and word.

"But worse, is perpetuated in the world today," one may protest. Certainly, that is the truth, but the will of God is seen in this act preserved for all time, just as his judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah depicts His judgment of perverted lifestyles for all time. No one gets away with anything. For it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that THE JUDGMENT! Heb. 9:27. Men shall indeed give account to the King of Kings and LORD of Lords for even every idle word spoken. "Go up bald head, go up!" became the up-going, not of the prophet, but of the children. How respectful then should we be of God and of all that is holy!?

FOR THOUGHT: How respectful are you toward God, His Word and His work in others? Do you find an arresting lesson in 2 Kings 2? What is it? Are you adding it to your deportment?

GOD BLESS YOU!

“God bless you!” is an oft heard exclamation in a wide variety of contexts. The exclamation is issued in frivolity to another’s sneeze, and most sincerely spoken as a deep desire for the wellbeing of others suffering in bereavement or pain. It may be directed to one who has gone astray spiritually in hopes of his being returned to the fold of obedience to the Word. Certainly, it is a powerful exclamation that God can use to accomplish much in the varied experiences of life common to us all.

For too long the assumption has reigned that one must have theological correctness down pat in order to witness to others. One of the most simple, and direct blessings in the Bible is recorded in Luke 6:20 as Jesus said, *“Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.”* Accordingly, God and His power are sold short. Please consider that it is amazing what He can use to prick human conscience. It is reminiscent of a story of a man who used these three powerful words as a common reply to anyone who greeted him. He never said “How are you?” He never said, “Nice weather isn’t it?” He always said, “God bless you!” Although not directly spoken, powerful messages emanated from those words. The one greeted knew immediately that he believed in God. He also perceived that the man had faith in God to bless the lives of others. Moreover, he could not but be humbled by the desire expressed that the blessings of deity be conferred upon him.

Well, as the story goes, the biggest sinner in town had been repeatedly greeted by this humble servant. It upset him. He exploded: “Why do you say ‘God bless you’ when you know full well that I am not a Christian? In fact, I do not believe there is a God!” To this retort the humble, well-meaning Christian replied, “Yes, I do know that sir, and those are the very reasons I want you to be blessed: that you many know my Lord and the joys of righteousness.” The confrontation did not diminish the kind salutations, and in time God used them to magnificent accomplishment.

“I simply could not get those words out of my head,” said the town’s biggest sinner after he found Jesus precious to his never-dying soul. This is a marvelous underscoring of how God can use simple words to train thoughts to Himself and His power. Such words are within the capability of most all of God’s people. Also, it is true that opportunities to witness in detail are often cultivated over time by such simple expressions. Furthermore, they are becoming to all Christians. Please consider that there is not one person on earth who does not need to be blessed in some way. Give it a try, and “God bless you!”

FOR THOUGHT: When was the last time you spoke such simple words of blessing to someone who may not have been expecting it? How did that make you feel? What did it cost you? Will you seek to do this more often?

GOD MADE ALCOHOL!

What a wonderful thing God did when He made alcohol! It has a very important basic purpose in the progress of humanity. But as with many other things, sinful men have learned ways to misuse and abuse it, and that is the very essence of sin: missing the mark; wrongful use. Noah learned, arguably through innocence, what the wrong use of alcohol could do. But since that time, men have chosen to use it as a beverage more than medicine.

Now, due to the desire for alcohol the people of Arkansas are staring at the possibility that they can no longer exercise the right of local governance to have their families to live in areas where alcohol is not merchandised as a beverage. The issue has been put before Arkansas voters and will appear again. If passed, some "Alcohol Amendments" automatically turns every Arkansas County wet regardless of the expressed will of the people who live there. It gives bars and liquor stores the right to operate next door to churches, schools, and day care centers, too.

What is at stake here is local governance, make no mistake about that! The ABC, (Alcoholic Beverage Control) Board has already circumvented the will of voters in dry counties by issuing the farce called "Private Club" status that any hamburger joint can acquire by simple application. So folks can sin by the misuse of alcohol most anytime they want. But the big buck-hungry enterprises want in on it too. They sponsor amendments to destroy local governance throughout the state. Here then is another reason that personal participation in elections is extremely important.

If everyone, and I do mean everyone, does not cast a vote, they can be sure they are casting a vote for the encroachment of sinful substance abuse that will come to their neighborhoods in a manner they do not want, but will be unable to do anything about. This cannot be underscored enough! Even if one does not agree about the misuse of alcohol, he should be extremely concerned that he is going to lose his local rights, and big money is poised to cash in by destroying even small neighborhoods.

FOR THOUGHT: Speaking up about local and regional issues continues. Expressions of thanks should be made to God regularly for this freedom and right to do so. It is important what one speaks up about negatively and positively. Is your voice being heard?

GOD'S SHARECROPPER

In 1939, (my birth year) Hollywood produced a box office bonanza with the all-time classic movie, GONE WITH THE WIND. It depicted a labor intensive way of life forever gone. Of course, in 1939 the nation was only about seventy years beyond the Civil War, so, those times were still on the mind of older citizens (much like WWII remains on older minds today). In addition to those times, there are also many things, and ways that have fallen to the chapters of history, especially with the vaunted progress of the 20th Century. I write briefly about one of those ways of life: that of the now largely extinct sharecropper.

Well over a half a century ago, my pastoral ministry was initiated in the cotton and bean fields of northeast Arkansas. Most folks in the area were known as sharecroppers. Like the aforementioned movie, this, too, is a way of life largely gone with the wind.

Sharecroppers lived in someone else's house on someone else's land. In varying agreements, they worked the land for the land owner, and shared a percentage of the crops produced. It was not much of a way to get ahead in life, but it was a way to sustain life. Most of the houses provided were substandard, and largely without indoor plumbing. My wife and I spent one memorable winter night with a family in that environment. To stay warm, we slept under so many quilts that it was virtually impossible to turn over. However, though poor, the people were sweet, kind and loving, and they loved the Lord, and they loved my young wife and me. It was such a joy to be considered their pastor, although a neophyte in every sense of the word.

Years have come and gone, and I am, as they were: a sharecropper. But, the sharecropping presently experienced is being accomplished in an agreement with God, the true land owner. Paul taught in I Cor. 3:9, *"For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."* We plant and water, but He gives the increase. It is He who has given us this laboring ministry of reconciliation, and He teaches us all in Psalm 126:6, *"He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."*

Formerly, due to weather or pestilence, crops might fail, leaving the farming sharecropper in dire straits financially. But one may be sure that sharecropping with God brings a guaranteed successful harvest to the rejoicing of everyone involved. Since all are tenants and not owners, they are sharecropping for someone. But soon the window of time for sharecropping on this terrestrial ball will pass away. It is but for a season. Consequently, it is so very important to choose wisely with whom you partner in the sharecropping venture of life.

FOR THOUGHT: Most everyone necessarily share crops in some industry to provide for the things needed in life, but who are you sharecropping with in spiritual matters? There are many voices, but one is true. Are you sharecropping with Him?

GOLD TO GIVE AWAY

There are few verbal equals at arresting attention than the word “Gold.” Gold is considered the ultimate in precious metals, and highly desired for jewelry, dental work, reliable mechanical function, artwork, and a number of other uses where durability, dependability, and functionality are important, but most of all it represents wealth. When standards are referenced, it is the “gold standard” that is prized most. Some people refer to retirement years as the “golden” years. Certainly, the most desirable metal of the Olympics is the gold one, designating the ultimate winner. But, there are other things of great value referred to as “gold.” Think about it!

The substance of the New Jerusalem, the permanent, eternal home of the saints is referred to as made of gold. Moreover, the faithful work of God’s people that will survive the fire at the Judgment Seat of Christ Jesus is referred to as gold, silver, and precious stones. I Cor. 3:9-16.

Perhaps all of this is meant to underscore the extreme value of what is ours in the here and now to give away. It is what Solomon said in Proverbs 25:11 *“A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”* Without doubt, this is the gold most presently, and acutely needed in a world of failures, dross, and discouragement. An encouraging word, not useless flattery, is so golden. It reaches the heart, and gives heart in a time when it is needed most.

To someone drowning in discouragement; to someone looking for a way up; to someone who is worn down with health, financial, even spiritual problems, a word fitly spoken is as pure gold in a pitcher of silver. The most wonderful thing about this is we all have a virtual bottomless vault of such apples of gold to share, and having shared them no shortage is realized, rather, wealth is increased in the sharing.

So, what is holding you back from helping yourself by helping others with these apples of gold in pictures of silver? Whatever it is, it is an impoverishing agent both to self and to others. Since we cannot bankrupt our supply of “golden apples,” ought we not to give as many away as opportunity presents? So, “God bless you, my friends” you are made in the very image of Almighty God. You are so important, and the very Creator has plans of great goodness for you, who trust Him, and follow Him. He has made it possible for you to do this, and to be an ambassador of His, giving away God’s great bounty to us all: words fitly spoken: apples of gold in pictures of silver.

Solomon said, *“As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprov-er upon an obedient ear.”* Proverbs 25:12

FOR THOUGHT: Think of yourself as a giant repository of wealth. It is yours to give away. Try it now! You will find each apple of gold you give to someone will increase your own wealth of life beyond expectation. How did you feel when you presented someone with a golden apple?

GOOD RESULTS NECESSITATE GOOD DECISIONS

From the hall of personal memories of decades long past, comes a story underscoring bad decisions and bad results. On a rare occasion both mother and father were absent from the home. Teenage sister decided she would make some cinnamon rolls. Well into the process, she discovered the cinnamon container to be empty. So, she sent my little brother, about age 6, to the local grocery store to buy cinnamon. No money was involved as all things were charged, and paid for weekly. It remains a mystery why I, several years older, was not sent. Regardless, here is where things went awry.

The trip to the store ran right by a neighbor's house who loved practical joking. He stopped the little brother, and asked where he was going. Being told, he insisted there was no need to go to the store to get "simminon" as little brother pronounced it. He said there were lots of simminons right here on the tree, and he could have all he wanted.

The longer it took to gather the "simminons" the more anxious and angry the sister became. When he showed up with a can full of persimmons, she really blew her top! She literally ran all the way to the store herself to get a can of cinnamon. I can still hear the laughter of the neighbor, now joined by my own at the frustration of the incident. But, it underscores an important lesson of life.

Good results necessitate good decisions. The desired results from a messenger demand a knowledgeable messenger who understands the goal, and who will not be sidetracked by someone offering a substitute or shortcut. The world is full of messengers with erroneous messages which they, themselves do not understand, but are quick to offer as a substitute for "thus saith the Lord." Note 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. It is to such a scenario that the words of the apostle Paul to the Galatians comes to mind: *"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."* Gal. 6:7.

Do you expect good results at the end of your trail of life? What kind of decisions are you making? There is one Creator of heaven and earth; one author of all life. He is the One that should be trusted. Why would anyone trust any other?

FOR THOUGHT: Upon whose word are you trusting for the eternal destiny of your never dying soul? Is it other than the Word of the Creator God? If so, it is extremely important that you make some immediate changes.

GRAMMAR'S IMPACT ON BIBLE TRANSLATION

The ancient Hebrew language in which the Old Testament was written employs a written indicator of a direct object in a sentence. The linguistic sign is transliterated “eth” and is not translated since it is understood as only a sign or pointer of what is coming next, grammatically. However, no matter what rule may be generally applicable, there will be times and instances when the rule is broken. In case of the direct object sign, it is sometimes translated “with” or “from” or “even” without any clear reasoning except translators thought such translation made the idea clearer in English. I have also noticed that taking such liberty with language may create more problems than those it intends to solve.

Attention is drawn to Genesis 4:1 which states, *“And Adam knew (eth) Eve his wife and she conceived and went on to bear a child (eth) Cain; moreover, she said I have gotten a man (eth) Jehovah.”* (literal translation). Notice that the direct object sign (eth) is used three times in this verse. In the English Bible, it is (properly) not translated the first two times, but translators assigned the word “from” to the third usage. There is no just or consistent cause for this translation, and if a translation were to be made here it more probably should have been “even” The reason being that the uniform translation of the verse conveys the idea that Eve thought she had given birth to the Messiah of Whom the first couple had been informed, and Whose sacrifice had been portrayed to them to cover their nakedness.

Of course, the coming of Messiah was some four thousand years in the future, but that information was not conveyed to them. The vicissitudes of time was not the point, but belief in God and His Word was the point. Not many references to the span of the ages were made until the prophets Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah. Even those great men of God did not see nor understand the great span of time of the church age.

Of course, Cain was far from being Jehovah. He was a mere sinner, and the first murderer, which soon became evident. So, men have received promises, and in them looked onward, forward, and were not disappointed in the faith. They received the fulfillment of so many promises! Some were so fortunate as to walk and talk with Jehovah (Jesus), and all of us who believe in Him will see His coming again, and be transformed to see Him as He is. We may be so grateful for the faith of mother Eve. Her son was not to be the promised Messiah, but the important thing is that she looked for Him.

FOR THOUGHT: What about you, dear reader? Are you looking for Him? Pause and consider the blessed promise that can be yours in Hebrews 9:28.

GRAVE DANGER IN SPIRIT WORLD POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

"Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit." Matthew 12:33

Political correctness pointedly detracts from reality. It is designed to soften, if not to outright deny reality. It certainly creates a sense that reality does not matter so much. Consider typical examples: one is not short, but height challenged. One is not overweight, but weight challenged. One is not ignorant, but simply intellectually challenged. On and on it goes, ad nauseam!

Now, extrapolate that method of thinking into the spiritual realm. It comes up something like this: one is not saved, he is just spiritually challenged. One is not backslidden, but is simply obedience challenged. One is not a dependable church member, so he is fellowship challenged. One is not baptized, just initiation challenged. So, on and on this may go, ad nauseam!

In spiritual matters, too many people have learned the spiritually correct answers to basic questions. But, their actions show beyond doubt that they do not believe what they profess by those answers.

It is reminiscent of what holy writ recorded from the prophet Isaiah about some religious folks a long time ago. *"Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precepts of men: "* Isa. 29:13. Many years later, Jesus referred to this scripture by saying, *" . . . Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me."* Mark 7:6.

Spiritual and political Correctness is not new, and the charade continues. But, true belief is demonstrated in actions. If people really believed that The Creator God will one day split the skies in return, and that all must stand before Him to give an account of the deeds done in the body whether they are good or evil, they would not simply cast off such awesome responsibility with fleshly ease. They would not seek to quickly justify it by watered down phraseology. Rather they would run to the altar of God in repentance seeking reconciliation with their righteous Creator.

FOR THOUGHT: Let the lyrics of a great old hymn be words of meditation!

"One day you'll stand at the bar of God,
One day your record you'll see,
One day you'll answer the question
of life,
What will your answer be?
What will it be, O, what will it be?
Where will you spend your eternity?"

What will your answer be?

GREASING THE SLIDE TO MARGINALIZE

The marginalization of spiritual influence in modern society is often lamented, and those doing so may be greasing the slide unwittingly. Think with me for a moment.

Pastors, more than churches, want all the pews filled. Their motive is not always singular or biblical. Somehow a large crowd seems to them to validate their ministerial value. When that occurs, worship format, terminology, and honorable traditions are tossed to appeal to a spiritually challenged people who will continue to demand, and to make concessions as they deem them good from a humanistic viewpoint. The theological slide being greased by that embodies appeals to please that are directed away from God toward men. It is subtle, and often takes a while for its fruit to be evident, but it is nonetheless real. Notice the propensity to drop time-honored, costly values because they are not readily understood or appreciated by the lost world.

In hypocritical reverence, Christ rejecting Jews reveal fake piety by refusing to type "God," in written form, insisting it must be set forth as "G-D" lest deity be offended. Then some Baptists awed. in ignorance. take up the same error. God told Moses His name, not a bunch of dashes. Men and God should be addressed by name!

Moreover, Missionary Baptist Churches have a grand heritage bathed in the blood of millions of martyrs since the days of Jesus on earth. Now, some do not want to call themselves "Baptists" for fear of rejection by the world. So, theirs is the "Church at Bird-nest Hollow," etc.

Personally, I want people to know that I am a Missionary Baptist and that Baptists are identified by the great doctrines of the faith once delivered to the saints. Names carry power to edify or debase by their sanctified reception or lack thereof. Being marginalized for truth's sake is bad enough, why grease the slide by seeking to build by deception?

But, criticism should be constructive. Since a little leaven leavens the whole lump, why not stick with tried and true paths that please the Lord? More and more, God's true work on the earth is being marginalized by the world of religious men. It is an hour for His people to stand up and be counted, to be proud of who and what they are, not to make slide greasing concessions that can only further marginalize their meaning and influential power.

FOR THOUGHT: Have you noticed that some people are fond of nicknames, but they want those to be pronounced or written correctly? Why would anyone withdraw from addressing the Creator fully as correctly as possible? Is such not a further disrespect of the God they have already rejected and crucified? God and His church have a grand heritage and reputation. They deserve to have their names set forth correctly and fully.

HEADQUARTERS OF TRUTH

In the sphere of religion, the Lord's churches have no earthly headquarters. Comprehending that is difficult for some folks. Churches of the Catholic, Protestant, and some Neo-protestant persuasions do create their earthly headquarters which is often the home of upper echelons of an episcopal (preacher) hierarchy. Yet, there is a spiritual headquarters of a sort on earth to which all scriptural churches are inexorably attached. Think with me!

First, the words of the apostle Paul are noted as he wrote to young Timothy, *"But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."* I Tim. 3:15. Next, the basic meaning of key terms in that verse is determined. The term "Behave" is from the ancient Greek "Anastrepho" meaning "To turn about" that is, how to conduct oneself in every turn of life or situation one may face. The term "Pillar" is from "stulos" a prop or support. The term "ground" is from the word, "hedraioma" a stay or support. This word comes from the base word meaning to sit or "seat."

Two graphic ideas are in play by the usage of the two terms. The idea of "seat" indicates location or place, but apart from any geographical site. It is the centralized and concentrated center. In modern times one may refer to a certain city as the county seat. The city is not so called because of its location, streets, shops, institutions, etc. Rather, it is so known because the centralized concentration of governmental authority with its necessary trappings are there. The second idea is that of a pylon, a main support of a structure.

Finally, the specific ideas conveyed by those terms are taken into account. The something or someone identified in I Timothy 3:15 as being the seat and supporting pillar of truth is the church of the Living God. Consider that it is the special object of love, protection, and predestination in Christ Jesus. It is the Pearl of Great Price, the Treasure Hidden in a Field, the branches of the True Vine; His flock; His commissioned agency among men; His bride, His anointed body. Its purpose is not primarily social or financial, but spiritual. It has a commission to win, baptize, and teach the truth rather than build buildings, little personal kingdoms, or serve as springboards for episcopal (preacher, pastor) popularity. It is the seat and pylon of truth as presented in Holy Writ. One looking for truth must look to the preserved Word that came to men from heaven. One looking for the seat and pylon of that Word among men find it in a true church of the Living God that is a legitimate successor of the apostolic church; one standing for and subjugated to the Word.

OR THOUGHT: Like Israel of old who wanted a king, a lot of religious organizations must have their earthly headquarters, but not so, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their headquarters is in heaven, and their leadership centered on the Holy Spirit. Does that make sense to you? If not, will you seek to understand the Bible about this matter?

HEARING THE AUTHORITY

There is a book called the MISHNAH. It is a collection of rabbinical schools of thought on various aspects of the Mosaic Law, and considered second only to the TORAH (first five books of the Bible: LAW) in holy esteem. There were, in fact, several rabbinical schools interpreting the Law, and many of their interpretations were contradictory. If a poor Hebrew wanted to know what some statement of the Law meant and/or how it was to be applied, he would seek a rabbi for information. Such a rabbi most probably would say, "Well, according to the school of Hillel, it means thus and so." He would go on to say, "But according to the school of Shlomoh, it means this. On the other hand, according to the school of Yitsach, it means this and this, under certain conditions." So, the poor man would go away scratching his head, no more enabled to solve the problem than before the consultation. The folks in Jesus' day were all too acquainted with this procedure.

Then in the fullness of time, Jesus appeared on the scene, preaching that they should repent for the kingdom of heaven was at hand. As He engaged His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew Chapters five through seven, He often said, "*Ye have heard that it hath been said of them of old time..... But I say unto you.....*" As he laid out the contrast between Law and the system of grace, He spoke forcefully and adamantly. Therefore, it is of little wonder that at the end of that sermon, it is written, "*. . . the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*" Matt. 7:28, 29. THEY WERE HEARING THE AUTHORITY OF HEAVEN AND EARTH!

The apostle John reports, "*All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made.*" John 1:3. The God of heaven and earth was resident in the man Jesus. He is the Creator, and nothing exists that He did not create. As Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, He is also Lord of time and eternity and the beginning of all things as well as the end. What He had to say to the Jewish people shocked and amazed them. Many believed Him and rejoiced. Others did not. But, there is one thing they could not deny: they were hearing the Authority!

Centuries have turned into millenniums since that sermon was preached near the Sea of Galilee. The things He said are still just as true today as they were back then. Moreover, those things still shock those who take the time to listen. Those who believe find joy, peace, and life. Those who do not believe Him stumble on in a darkened world in which little if anything makes sense. "There are too many religions," they say. "So many things that churches say contradict one another, as do the Law interpretations of the MISHNAH. What are we to believe?" The answer is simple. Hear the Authority! Believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him! Heb. 11:6. He is the Creator. Why would anyone look elsewhere?

FOR THOUGHT: Strangely, people demand written proof and documented evidence on countless subjects of law, business, and life events in general. Why are they content, then, to believe things purported to be of eternal value without checking them out with the Word? What do you believe? Why? Do you spend a little time each week reading the Bible? Why not?

HEART GATES: OPEN AND SHUT

“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he. . .” Prov. 23:7.

To think in one's heart is to open the gate of the heart to that specific subject matter. This is a picturesque concept that the Hebrews knew only too well. The idea is driven home by the realities of the city of Jerusalem, a city of gates.

It was not a difficult matter to determine the business at hand in the lives of folks in Jerusalem. All one had to do was observe which gate they were using. A brief survey of a map of the ancient city reveals a number of gates. There was the Fish Gate; the Sheep gate, the Golden gate; the Dung gate, etc. All one had to do was observe the gate being used to determine what was on one's mind: his business at the moment. If he were using the Fish gate, he was buying or selling fish. If he were using the Dung gate, he was going to or coming from the garbage dump. If he were using the Golden gate, he was coming from or going to the Temple. If he were using the Sheep gate, he was buying or selling sheep, usually as sacrificial animals. So on it goes.

It remains just as certain today that whatever one (gates) opens his heart to, particularly as habitual, so he is, and so he will be understood and identified. For out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks, and/or a person acts. One must be careful how he opens the gates to his heart. It also follows that if one opens the gate of his heart to the Word of God, and meditates on God, and on the things of God, it will be known to all. That will be the traffic of his life; the evidence indisputable, and the observance by others certain. *“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he . . .”* To this, the beloved Apostle Paul adds: *“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”* Philippians 4:8. With the help of God, one may control what he meditates on in his heart. Reject some things, and specifically admit some things by following this biblical advice.

FOR THOUGHT: Did you know there is danger in entertaining illicit and evil thoughts? Every person in prison thought about doing evil before doing it. When an evil thought knocks on your mental door, do you invite it in and give it the easy chair? Will you try Phil. 4:8 next time?

HEAVEN HAS AIR CONDITIONING!

Summer in much of the world finds man, animal, and plant life at the mercy of extremely high temperatures sometimes matched with equally high humidity. Men seek refuge in air conditioned houses, cars, and workplaces when possible. Gardens burn and die. Animals are often hard pressed to survive in any absence of rain. Truly, it can be miserable! Let's think about it for a minute or two!

There is a verse in Revelation (among many) which is intriguing! It says in English, *"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."* (7:16). It is this last phrase, "nor any heat" that catches attention. What is meant here? That the sun of the Milky Way solar system will be gone is understood, but the notion that life flourishes in an environment without any heat merits thought. Could it be that life in the next dimension exists in what is now known as absolute cold? Of course, if so, all would be impervious to it, but while intriguing, the thought is discounted for something better. Heaven has perfect air conditioning! Jesus will be the light of heaven, and the environment will never be too hot or too cold since life in resurrected, immortal bodies will be unaffected by those things. But there is more.

The term "heat" as used in this verse identifies burning, consuming heat. It alludes not only to literal heat of that sort, but to the burning, consuming heat of temptations, difficulties and pressures of life so common to earthly existence.

Certainly, there is more than one reason that the term "heaven" has a blissful ring to its sound. When one's imagination has done its utmost to envision the ultimate ideal of immortal, incorruptible life, it falls woefully short of its reality due to the limitations of one's present status and environment. Nice things are spoken of as being "heavenly," but they only connote a tiny bit of idealism that heaven holds for those who will enjoy it forever. To miss that is surely the most unthinkable thing in all the vocabularies of all men! It is so grand as to make all other things known to mankind trivial. On the limited commission of Jesus to His disciples, they returned with tremendous rejoicing stating that even the devils were subject to them in the name of the Lord. Jesus proverbially brushed that aside and told them a far better reason to rejoice was the fact that their names are written in heaven. Is your name written down in heaven? If not, there is another eternal home where it is forever hot beyond imagination, and there is no island or refuge of air conditioning there!

FOR THOUGHT: Did you know that heaven is presented in the Bible as a place of comfort, rest, and the absence of any and all problems so that perfect peace prevails? Finite minds, even spiritual minds in this world cannot begin to comprehend its never-ending wonder. Are you prepared for it? Did you know admittance there is not automatic without preparation?

HEAVEN'S OFFER: A LIFE OF ADVANTAGE!

"And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day."
Genesis 32:24.

Enduring and mighty lessons spring from what many may see as strange and perplexing events in the Old Testament. Such is the case of the patriarch Jacob wrestling all night with an angel as recorded in Genesis 32.

In context, Jacob was returning from Padam-aram (modern Iraq) with his wives, children, livestock, and substance to his parental homeland. He was under a death threat from his brother, Esau who sold Jacob his birthright, but was extremely angered when Jacob engaged in trickery to actually obtain it. News had come to Jacob that Esau was coming with hundreds of armed men, so he assumed the worst and implemented a cunning plan of appeasement to preserve life and achieve peace.

Moreover, in the long night before meeting his brother, Jacob is said to have wrestled with an angel until the dawning of the day. Refusing to release his hold on the angel until he should be blessed, Jacob was given his blessing, and with it a change of name to "Israel."

"Israel" is a composite of two words: "Ish" "man," (royal man), "possessor of power" and "El" "God"; hence, one who has power with God and prevails. This new word became the name of the patriarch from that day forward. Moreover, that name was transferred to the aggregate of his offspring, the Hebrew people who were the Old Testament people of covenant with God, and through Whose power they prevailed often against impossible odds. They had a real advantage (inside track) with God, But it was not after the flesh, but of God's choosing.

Today, the homeland of the Jewish people is referred to as Israel, but what made that name significant, the presence and power of God, was withdrawn upon their final rejection of their Messiah Who said of them, *"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate..."* Luke 13:35. Jesus had come not only to pay the sin penalty for mankind, which men could not pay, but to bring His covenant people out from under the dispensation of law into the marvelous New Covenant of Grace. A remnant did so follow the Lord, and He also graciously incorporated the nations of all who would believe and follow Him. Hence, the beloved apostle Paul tells us that the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ is "the Israel of God." Galatians 6:16. So long as the grace of God is extended in this dispensation of time called "today," men have the blessed privilege of being a part of that Israel, "One who has power with God and prevails, even His people of the New Covenant."

Do you have an obedient and talking relationship with God? It really is an advantage of blessings both in time and in eternity!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe that the people who possess a covenant with God have an advantage in spiritual things? Did you also know that such a blessed position may not be used to tempt God or to become personally arrogant about it? Are a member of one of the Lord's bona fide New Testament churches who walk in covenant relationship with Jesus?

HEMISPHERIC AND SPIRITUAL OPPOSITES

For anyone wishing to experience winter in August or summer in January, the possibility may be realized by simply traveling to a different hemisphere. Let me illustrate with a personal story.

Many years ago, Laura and I made a trip to Australia to encourage the missionary from our church, and to assist in selecting and arranging financing for land on which to build a church house. It would be the first missionary effort of the churches of the American Baptist Association to that country.

The near three-week trip also featured preaching, scouting out parcels of land, meeting with bankers, and squeezing in a small amount of sightseeing.

In a short time, the longing for American food surfaced. Once on the road a truck stop was sighted. Surely, they would have some good food. Upon ordering what was thought to be a hamburger, it was found to be a mutton sandwich enhanced with a spread of vegemite and beetroot slices. Simply horrible!

A trip to Canberra, the capital city, yielded more palatable cuisine. A pizza shop made fairly good pizza, but the Aussies ate it with a fork and knife! I suppose we appeared to be barbarians but we just had to use our hands.

Later something new to that country was found—a Kentucky Fried Chicken store. We loaded up and headed up scenic Mt. Kosciusko where we would presumably enjoy the sights over a picnic lunch. By reaching the Ranger Station, more than half way up, there was no more lovely weather. Four to six inches of snow lay on the ground and roads leading further up the mountain were closed due to several feet of fresh snow. So, we enjoyed the snow laden picnic tables, and marveled that hemispheric placement allowed us to throw snowballs in August. It was a realistic reminder that what a lot of folks need is a spiritual hemispheric change, not so much here on the planet, but in their own personal world.

Ancient Isaiah cried out in the presence of God, *“Woe is me, . . . for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.”* Isaiah 6:5. Such is the environment of our Christ-rejecting world, but there is another place. Call it hemispheric, dimensional, or whatever. It is the eternal, spiritual state afforded men in Christ Jesus. There the opposite of this world is the norm. Instead of sin, hurting, death, and decay, there is righteousness, joy, life, and eternal prime.

Now that is the change I elect to have through repentance from sin, and placing faith in Christ Jesus as my personal Savior. Tired of sin? There is an eternal opposite! His arms reach out for you!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you long for a spiritual change? You cannot effect such, but God can, and will when properly approached. Have you invited Him into your life? Did you know that will not work either, that is unless you come to him with a contrite heart in repentance from sin? Did you know change is His specialty?

HOLY STUFF OR HOLEY STUFF, WHOLLY?

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God.” Matthew 22:29

Words with the same or very similar phonetic sounds are called homophones. Since they are often indistinguishable in sound, understanding them depends on proper context in spoken language, and proper spelling in written form.

“Holy” means sacred, worthy of reverence, etc. “Holey” means full of holes. “Wholly” means all, or complete. The homophonic quality of these words with meanings so different lends them to a lesson application.

In an acute, spiritually anemic world of religion, many variant voices are heard purporting to be the will of the Lord. Such voices may have a well chosen “springboard” verse of scripture twisted out of biblical context to support the peculiar nuance of the speaker. Pity the poor listener who believes whatever may be set before him simply because a pet scripture has been used as a prop. A sane and sensible question one should ask is, “Is this message holy stuff or simply holey stuff, wholly?”

Once a scripture has been twisted out of context, it no longer conveys the holy truth it is meant to convey within its context. It is full of holes, and will not hold spiritual water. The practice creates a common commentary of the last days.

Let it be underscored that the Bible is not a disjointed collage of opposing ideas, neither is it a code known only to a select few. It is not the gift of the church to the world, rather it is God’s gift to the church to share with the world that they may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The honest Bible student will not read into the scriptures pre-supposed ideas, but will read out of the scriptures the contextual ideas that are harmoniously conveyed.

Since the Bible is the plenary word of God, one may be sure that harmony, symmetry, and unity prevail in its presentation to the exclusion of any contradiction whatsoever. The depth of the inspired instructions is such that the serious Bible student will continue to learn from it as long as he lives, but such learning will always harmonize with the elementary, indisputable lessons first learned.

Conversely, the charlatan purveyors of that which is holey continue in increasing numbers as biblically predicted for the last days. By these things the necessity of a life anchor in the Holy Word is underscored. All who are blessed to live in these last days do well to “try the spirits” to determine from which source they come. This may take the initial form of simply questioning with a determination to know the answer: “Is this holy stuff, or is it simply holey stuff, wholly?” Every message must stand or fall by the unerring measure of Heaven’s unified Word!

FOR THOUGHT: Did you know that cults and other heretical religious movements will use terms with which you are familiar, but they will have different definitions attached to those terms? Name some of the stuff you have been presented that is not holy, but holey wholly. If someone is trying to present something “holy” to you, demand the address of a verse of scripture where it is found, then study the verse in its context.

HOLY: A BIBLE “BE”

“Holiness!” What a grossly misunderstood term due to the propensity of men to identify it in the flesh rather than in the spirit. Clear your mind, and think with me for a moment!

Dozens of times the command and appeal is made to the people of God to be holy for the Lord their God is holy. When the Hebrews were being delivered from Egyptian bondage and beginning their journey to the Promised Land, God said: *“And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. . . .”* Exodus 19:6. The apostle Peter restated this application to the New Testament churches when he wrote, *“Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”* I Peter 1:16 Then in I Peter 2:9 he wrote, *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”* One such reference is enough, but the abundance of New Testament references that call God’s people to holiness is more than sufficient to underscore the need of it in modern day application.

The question remains: what is this holiness to which God’s people of covenant are called? The Old Testament term is the Hebrew “Qadash” which means “to set apart, be separated unto” This same term is also translated “Sanctify.” The New Testament Greek term denoting holiness is “Hagios,” which carries the same idea as “Qadash” and is also translated “saints.” Now, we are hot on the trail of understanding this oft repeated Bible injunction.

The next question to be answered is: what is the means by which one becomes holy or set apart? To many Christian religionists, it is a fleshly goal. The reasoning is that if one can through much difficulty conquer most of the evil deeds of the flesh, he will achieve holiness, and become more spiritual. That is reverse action and consistently fails. The Bible plan is to submit to God and to His pure Word in unreserved faith. That will automatically conquer the flesh to the degree that separation to Him will be evident. Paul chided the churches of Galatia about this very thing, saying: *“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”* Gal. 3:3.

To be separate, holy, unto God then is to achieve knowledge and understanding of the teaching of the Holy Word, and to receive it, keep it, and propagate it through the medium of faith, even the faith once delivered to the saints. How are you doing with this important Bible “Be?”

FOR THOUGHT: Did you get the idea that to be holy is to be sanctified? The synonymous terms mean “Set apart” in obedience to the teachings of the Bible. So, how may you be holy? It is a process of salvation, baptism, church fellowship, study, prayer, witnessing, etc. Get it? What have you done to set yourself apart for God?

HOOKS IN THE JAWS

Several decades ago I was sitting in my doctor's waiting room when a mother with two small boys came in. All attention was riveted on one boy who had a fishing lure with grab hooks in it in his mouth with two of the hoods penetrating his lip and jaw. Later I learned that his story was this: "My brother and I were playing fishing, and it was my turn to be the fish!" Painful? Oh yes! A little humorous? Indeed! Needless to say hooks in his jaw rendered him totally ready for medical help.

Perhaps the illustration is a little crude, but in Ezekiel 38:4, God says of Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, that He would put hooks into his jaws to bring him forth, an exceeding great army. Moreover, in verse 16 God says that it is He Who brings Gog down against His people in the end time of the age, so that God may be sanctified by the nations; that they might know Him.

This is so reminiscent of what God did in Egypt in the days of the Hebrew Exodus. It was God Who hardened the heart of Pharaoh that the plagues might continue upon the Egyptians, and that He might be acknowledged by them that He is GOD! The world may choose to ignore God, but He will be sanctified in them. He is the Creator whether the world wants to acknowledge that or not. The day comes when they will do so to the last person.

It is interesting to note that some of the greatest military and political minds that are given to strategy now acknowledge Putin as the meanest, most resolved, headstrong, and powerful leader in the world, stopping at nothing to get what he wants. In recent days, the world has stood by while his forces simply marched in and claimed Crimea of Ukraine. The prediction now is that he will not stop there since there is no resolve among the nations to seriously challenge him. They see him taking all of Ukraine eventually, and then for some reason that is not presently clear, most likely political, he will make his move on Israel. The sea merchants and young lions (western nations) will say, "*Are you come down to take a spoil..... ?* verse 13. Perhaps, they will once again threaten to close his western bank accounts! But is this to be lamented? Let Christians be biblically literate and wise. God Himself is doing this. He is putting hooks in the jaws of Gog. He will be sanctified of the heathen. Some bible scholars see this as a pre-Armageddon battle. Others think it is Armageddon. It is difficult to see this as clearly as one would like, but the greater picture shines through powerfully. Nations have forgotten and ignored the very idea of the Creator God. In time, He will put hooks in the jaws of Gog, and He will be sanctified of the heathen. The wise realize they do not know all things, and they are very slow to make definitive predictions or judgments. Rather they keep these things in their heart and ponder them as they coalesce the wonders of the Holy Word.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe the Bible revealed works to bring the age to a conclusion were finished from the foundation of the world? If so, is there any power in the universe to stop or even postpone them? From what you know of the Bible and of world events, do you think the end of the age is near?

HOPPING KANGAROOS: HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND?

"But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness." Acts 26:25

After Calvary Baptist Church, Duncan, Oklahoma sent their endorsed missionary to Australia to open that field of witness to the churches of the American Baptist Association, they later sent Laura and me there in 1972 to help search out an appropriate building site and possibly arrange financing. International currencies were fluctuating wildly, and the Australian Dollar was actually worth more than the U.S. dollar.

In consultation with the president of Commonwealth Bank in Campbelltown, New South Wales, it became apparent that financing would have to be done in the United States. However, the jolly fellow offered this possible help for fundraising. His chain of banks had ordered 10,000 Kangaroo coin banks for advertisement, but they did not meet their specifications, and were rejected. He suggested that those banks might be bought for ten cents each instead of the original one dollar cost.

I thought it a great idea. After contacting the company that made them, they offered to sell them to us at just that price: ten cents each. It was a deal if they would be responsible to ship them to America. They agreed! About three months later, I received a phone call that my shipment was in port at New Orleans. A local pastor walked them through customs and had a freight company ship them to Oklahoma.

So, do you know how many 10,000 kangaroo banks are? Somehow I did not. Instead of a regular delivery truck with a couple of boxes, a tractor-trailer truck arrived with a lot of huge boxes. Kangaroo banks were everywhere in the church house: classrooms, hallways, etc. Then to top it all off, the ladies auxiliary thought I had lost my mind when I asked them to put stickers on each one, but they did it anyway, and enjoyed the fellowship while doing it.

Then in 1973, I pulled a large U-Haul trailer to the ABA meeting in Little Rock and provided a large sack of banks to every church messenger who would agree to use them. They were asked to have Sunday School classes fill a bank with coins at least one time, and mail the offering to us. After that, they could use the banks for their own fundraising projects.

Before it was over, those who may have initially thought I had lost my mind were smiling because God's people responded, and funds began rolling in to pay for a two acre plot of ground known as Mountain View, overlooking Campbelltown from the Lumeah area, a suburb of Sydney, Australia.

Today, a beautiful church plant sits on the property where a fair sized congregation meets to worship regularly. Most of the time, the Lord's provisions come in unusual ways, giving all the more reason to rejoice. Hopping Kangaroos! If this is losing one's mind, it would be such a pleasure to do it all over again!

FOR THOUGHT: Think of some unusual ways God has answered your pressing need or your prayers? How did that make you feel? Are you better prepared to trust His guidance as a result?

HOW BAD IS ONE LITTLE SIN?

A considerable amount of conversation over the years has involved two phrases: a little white lie, and a big black lie. Is there a difference? Think with me about it.

It is the propensity of folks to categorize right and wrong by degree without any evidence of divine support. Admitting, propagating, and proceeding on such a foundation of thought is what the Bible calls iniquity. It is a viewpoint of sin coming from depraved hearts and/or carnal minds. Stay with me!

Consider the sinful, global mess of men. Initially, God set Adam and Eve in a beautiful, pristine garden under absolutely ideal conditions. His one obligation was to refrain from eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Now, hang on! The fruit of that tree is not identified, but something is known about it. It was pleasant to the eyes; it was good for food; it was desirable to make one wise. This is the triune temptation the apostle John wrote about saying, *"For all that is in the world; 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.

Now just how bad can the decision be to eat beautiful, luscious fruit from a tree in a garden given to your care? It is supposed that the entire world would say the decision seemed to be wise, and should be done, but how very wrong they would be.

So, that little white sin of simply eating what was forbidden brought down the entire cosmos into the laws of sin and death. Not just to Adam and Eve, but to all their posterity, and to the creation over which they were given lordship.

The conclusion is inescapable! There is no little sin, certainly no little white sin. Neither is there a little black sin, but all sin is big and black. Moreover, one sin admits the presence of sin, and not one sin will be present in the cosmos of God after judgment occurs.

A dear friend is old now, and has never professed Christ Jesus as his Savior. I pleaded with him to turn to the Lord. His reply was: "Well I have lived a pretty good life. I will just take my chances." Those words tore my heart! I replied, "My dear friend, you mean so much to me, and you mean so much to our Lord that He died to save you. So, I am telling you here and now that without Him in your heart, you do not have a single chance. Hell will be your eternal home if you depart as you are right now. I continue to pray that he will open his heart to God. Little sins are big sins. One must stop worldly comparisons and see the righteousness of the Son of God as the only righteousness acceptable to the Heavenly Father.

FOR THOUGHT: To commit one sin is to become a sinner, having broken the righteous laws of God. What is the difference between a chain being broken by the might strength of giant machines, and one being cut in two pieces by a little lady with a pair of lock cutters? Is the result not the same? So it is with sin! What are some of your "Little sins"? How does God see them?

HOW MANY HUSBANDS/WIVES???

An experience common to modern man is that of occasional wondering just who it is that is staring back at him in the mirror. One preacher said that each time he wants to look into the mirror; some old man beats him there. Once while visiting an old friend in the hospital whom I had not seen in many years, he said, "I know I look different, and some things have changed, but I am still the guy you knew years ago." Such is the often amazement of the aging process. In response to a question to one man by his wife: "Will you love me when I am old and gray?" came the reply, "Certainly; I have already loved you through six other colors!" On a more serious note, medical science tells us that with the exception of brain cells, every cell in the human body dies and is replaced every seven years, and it is the oxidation of cells creating imperfect replacements that accounts for the aging process. Hummm, every seven years! No wonder then that my wife has had eight husbands, and I have enjoyed eight wives! But alas, when brain cells die, they are not replaced. Could that mean there is a lot of short-circuiting going on between the ears? We are indeed a changing people in a changing world.

But, hold on, and rejoice! Our Creator/Savior is the same yesterday, today, and forever! So unchangeable also are His promises! The universal laws of sin and death are also unchangeable in the world of men. As the operation of those laws causes the human body to spiral downward into the clutches of death, so do they cause the very planet, and all therein to spiral downward. It is called the Second Law of Thermodynamics, the most provable law of science. But something else is potentially going on. Potentially, that is, to those who may not know the Lord personally in the free pardon of sin, but reality in those who do. In Holy Writ it is so stated: ". . . *but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*" 2 Cor. 4:16. This is shouting ground! This is the ultimate defiance of the Second Law of Thermodynamics! It is the essence of everlasting life in the here and now that shall continue to be enjoyed in eternity.

It is a blessing to enjoy multiple spouses all in one person that the aging process produces, but it is an exponentially greater blessing to know the eternal presence of spiritual life in Christ, and the exciting, invigorating hope it produces.

FOR THOUGHT: How many times has your body replicated itself? Do you realize the permanent state of your spiritual in contrast to the growth/deteriorating state of your body? Do you look forward to a new, incorruptible, immortal, non changing body?

HOW MANY, HOW MANY, I WONDER

“Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” Ephesians 3:21.

The enormity of the gross error of finite beings believing they may fashion codes of conduct, worship, and practice that will please the infinite, even though contradictory to His stated Word, continues to be literally astounding. But it never stops.

Some time ago a question was posed to a small group of seminary students: “which church do you think is correct?” One answered immediately, “What do you mean which church? God established only one!” Is it possible to identify that one, if it still exists? If so, how?

Dr. L. D. Foreman, former president of Missionary Baptist Seminary in Little Rock, Arkansas, in class lectures, used the illustration of a train being watched by a father and son in a beautiful meadow by a railroad track. Soon a train came by. It was a blue engine with a fuel car, eight box cars, three passenger cars, a dining car, and a caboose. The number on the engine was 712. It was then that the train entered a tunnel and disappeared. The little boy cried that it had been swallowed. To appease him, the father took him to the train yard so he could see that it was there. However in the train yard there were many trains: engines of red, yellow, black. Some were connected to coal bearing cars; others carried logs, still others were all box cars. Finally, they found a train with a blue engine, with numbers 712. It had a fuel car, eight box cars, three passenger cars, a dining car and a caboose. Certainly, they had found the very train which had disappeared into the tunnel earlier.

When Jesus started His church, he promised it perpetuity. So, if the Bible is true, and it is, then the church Jesus started is still on the earth. It is still being governed by His Word, adhering to His doctrines and practices. It is still free from the encroachments of designing men, and unions with governmental powers.

His church still teaches the total hereditary depravity of man, salvation by grace through faith, plus nothing else, deep water immersion of a professed believer by a New Testament church; believes that Jesus’ church is local only, and the highest echelon of spiritual organization on earth. It was started by Jesus! It was started in 30 A.D. in the land of Palestine, and has had monuments of its existence in every century since. I want to meet Jesus as a member in good standing of that church.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you know the origin of the church of your membership? If its faith and practice cannot be traced back to the apostles, do you see that as a problem? Do you think Jesus will receive and reward any church that is not his own? Why?

HOW SOLID IS THE ROCK OF THE WORD?

"He only is my rock and my salvation: he is my defence; I shall not be moved."
Psalm 62:6.

It seems evident that the farther down the lane of time mankind travels the more marginalized the Bible, and those who adhere to its teachings become. The drive to supplant it with humanism, pseudo-science, and situation ethics is near its zenith, and reaping what has been sown has begun. This will significantly increase in the short span of time left in this age. So, a review of the Rock of the Word is always in order, but it is boldly underscored in these troublesome times. Consider with me for a moment.

The Bible is described as the "plenary, inspired, infallible Word of God." Just what do these words mean? The term "Plenary" simply means "full, whole or complete." "Inspiration" means "God-breathed" or that the Holy Spirit superintended the writing of the scriptures, allowing each writer to use his own words, but assuring that the writing was without mistake. "Infallibility" means totally without error or fault.

Truly, all of these things are absolutely true of the original autographs of the Holy Scriptures. While the Old Testament documents written in Chaldean and Hebrew remain with us in largely uncontested fidelity to original writings, there is much controversy regarding the veracity of several copies of the original autographs of the New Testament. A large collection (30 or more) of the most ancient copies have been compared. They coincide and are accepted as authentic. These grouped together are commonly referred to as the "Received Text" or "Textus Receptus." The original documents themselves do not remain with us due to early persecution, manuscript burning, etc. Still, multiple copies of those documents do remain, many dating back to the 2nd and 3rd centuries. But claims of "inspiration" and "infallibility" should not be applied to copies of those original documents, but to the message such copies contain. For instance, if a scribe should have transposed a number of a census or date of an historical event, it would not be a material error of the spiritual truths God imparted to man in the original documents.

The original languages should be studied, but to what degree then may our modern translations of the Bible, such as the Geneva Bible and/or the King James Version be trustworthy? The answer is totally. God has indeed preserved His marvelous truth for all generations, so that none having access to the holy pages may be excused from the knowledge so plainly and forcefully set forth. It is indeed an awesome responsibility to own a Bible! So, when we say, or read, that we believe in the "Plenary inspiration and infallibility of the scriptures," we are saying that this description applies fully to the original documents. Furthermore, we affirm and have proven that our KJV is a correct presentation of God's will for man as was doubtless set forth in the original autographs. Heaven and earth will pass away, but the Word abides forever. The Rock of the Word is solid!

FOR THOUGHT: How solid is the Word of God in your mind? Does the criticisms of skeptics make the Bible any less true or perfect? If the Bible is as true as learned scholars who are disciples of Jesus say it is, why do you think more people do not believe it? Bottom line: do you believe is the true word of the Creator to mankind?

I, EYE, AYE: THE PROBLEM

Some sage once said, "A man wrapped up in himself makes a terribly small package." While most would agree, they must also acknowledge that this very principle is the primary cause of all the woes of the race. Think with me about this!

Luke 12:16-21 records the sad saga of a rich fool. He abounded in the richness of his day. His barns could hold no more. Did he seek to be helpful to others? No! He said to himself, "I" have no more storage room so "I" will pull down my buildings and "I" will build bigger ones. "I" will say "I" have much to last for many years so "I" will take it easy, eat, drink, and be merry. Alas, he died that night, and not having lived for the Lord nor invested in the lives of others, left his goods to the wiles of the world; truly a fool! His kind has not perished, but increased in the world: folks with "I" trouble.

Additionally, the temptation that succeeded in plunging the entire human family into sin was one of "I" and "eye" trouble. Mother Eve in response to Satan's self-serving appeal, saw that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was beautiful to look upon (lust of the eye); she saw it was good for food (lust of the flesh through the eye); and she saw it was desirable to make one wise (pride of life) ("I" and "eye" trouble). There was no forethought here regarding the Word and the Will of the Creator; just "I." Although that was nearly six thousand years ago, little children still sing out the warning, "O, be careful little eyes what you see...."

Enter Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He was allowed to build one of the seven wonders of the ancient world: the magnificent Babylon with broad avenues, hanging gardens, and splendid structures. He said, *"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"* ("I" and "Eye" trouble). He was judged immediately, and learned firsthand that these things were from, and for God. Daniel 4.

Finally, there is another form of that phonetic problem that plagues the people of God, and should be corrected by all means. It is revealed in the story of two sons, Matthew 21:28-31. A man directed one of his sons to go work in his vineyard. The son said "nay" (no), but he later did. To the other he gave the same direction, and that son said "aye" (yes), but never did. There are multitudes today who give acquiescent "aye" to the work of God, but never do it. They cannot imagine the enormity of the loss being incurred by such disobedience to their Heavenly Creator.

So, anyway you spell it, I, Eye, Aye, it is the sinful source of the ills of mankind in general, and of each individual in particular. May God help us to have a sweet spirit of truthful, and wholehearted surrender to the will of God Whom we all must soon meet face to face, and not be beset by the ages old, universal problems of "I, Eye, Aye."

FOR THOUGHT: How many times have you been sidetracked from important opportunities due to "I, Eye, Aye" trouble? Has considering these things retrospectively made any change in your decision making propensity?

IDENTIFYING THE REAL PRODIGAL

Eternal lessons are embedded in the Bible stories children love. Fraught with timeless principles and lessons of life, they Ignite the imagination of youth, and continue to weigh heavily even on the aged disciple. For instance, the story of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:11-32 is the subject of Sunday School lessons, sermons, songs, and is repeated often as a foundational principle of life. But, while the principals are a father and his two sons, it is the younger son who is always tagged as the prodigal. Has anyone ever seriously wondered if that is a correct interpretation? Think with me!

Of course, it was the younger, more immature son who wanted his share of his father's estate immediately. He went on to squander it with feigned friends who deserted him when broke and hungry. So he got a job feeding pigs, and to keep from starving shared some of their slop. Then in the bitterness of his experience, and repentance, he made his way back to his father's house to beg forgiveness.

Naturally, the father was elated to see his son, and particularly in a more mature and humble state of mind. But then there is the older brother, you know, the one who is always right, and never did anything wrong. He was not moved with compassion on his younger brother, and was less than happy that his father was now making a feast, and spending resources that would be his on the ne'er-do-well offspring. After all, he who served his father well had never been accorded a feast and such merriment.

What a clear picture of multiple lessons and two tangential attitudes of life! Doubtless, as long as the earth stands these scenarios will repeat themselves in every generation. But it is the idea of "Prodigal" that claims attention. Research shows the term originated in Latin as "Prodigals" meaning "wasteful, lavish, reckless." That term is derived from "prodigere" "to consume, squander."

There can be no doubt that the younger son was indeed a prodigal son, but to his credit, he found repentance, and sanity that resulted in restoration, and usefulness of the rest of his days. But what about older brother? His life was a material success, but in the important virtues and principles of life he was far afield of his father's compassion and will. His lot was one of selfishness, and wasted meaning by defining life in terms of materialism. Although loved and reasoned with by his father, there is no clear indication that he ever experienced a change of mind and heart. Could he be the real prodigal? Does his stereotyped kind still claim a "better than thou" attitude in many churches? Could it be that both sons were prodigal in different ways, but the wrong son has been labeled the greater "Prodigal?" A thoughtful answer to this question may be somewhat disconcerting.

FOR THOUGHT: What are your thoughts on the story of the prodigal son? Have you ever perceived yourself to be a prodigal? Can you identify someone you know as a prodigal? In the sight of God might we all be prodigals at one time or another?

IMPORTANT GIFTS TO A CHILD

"But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 19:14

How deep and how lasting are some gifts to a child? In my early childhood, living conditions went from bad to worse! Coming off the heels of the Great Depression, our country was forced into WWII. Our family had nothing, but the bare necessities of life, love for the Lord, and for one another. So, we were rich!

Once for Christmas, mom managed to save enough to get me a set of small rag-paper Bible story books. How I loved them and managed to keep one of them into adulthood. She bought them from the Jewel Tea man who peddled his goods from a truck.

Another time my Sunday School teacher, Agnes Wolfe, (I think her name was Minton before marrying Charles Wolfe.) taught class in a curtained off section of the one room church building. She gave me and others boys and girls in the class a picture of the Last Supper colorfully printed on hardboard. What a treasure! Now, I am an old man and I still have that picture, and I treasure its meaning more and more, and I will thank Agnes again for it in heaven.

Agnes loved the Lord. She was a very kind lady who, though large, dressed up to come to church as though she were going to a New York banquet. Her gift to me came two years before I was saved. I cannot say how much influence it had on that decision, but I can say it was most impressive that someone would give me something so wonderful, and my heart was always open and tender toward the lovely Lord Jesus Christ.

They say such recollection is strong evidence of growing old. Maybe so. I just like to think of it as a marvelous trip down memory lane that affords so many places to stop and smile, and be thankful for God, and for others who indelibly impressed a little guy in good things along the way.

The world has changed drastically from the days of WWII. Now, the hustle and bustle of persistently overloaded folks might cause them to not give so much as a passing glance at an act of goodness and kindness to a child, but children have not changed. Surely, they have been spoiled with material abundance, but loving kindness, and sincere beneficial love has been all but stifled. Perhaps that is why it is still the deep, lasting impression to which they cling. It is the best gift you can give a child. Give it!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you think many children are spoiled today because parents are determined to give them more than they had? If giving children more material things and less personal attention, love, and training, is that a good thing? Years fly by so swiftly, and children are children for such a little time. Are you letting precious time slip away?

IS SEEING BELIEVING?

An old adage is: "Believe nothing you hear, and only half of what you see." Caution in believing and decision-making is a hallmark of wisdom but in eternal matters should we all subscribe to the motto of Missouri: "show me?" Think with me!

Just because something may not be visible does not mean it is unreal. Worlds of bacteria and viruses affect our health and continued life. These cannot be seen by the natural eye, but they are real. Electrical currents power everyone's life. They cannot be seen, but they are real. The wind blows and its effects may be seen and felt, but the wind itself is unseen. Still, it is very real. So also is the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. Jesus used this very illustration to teach Nicodemus in John Chapter Three. Moreover, some may guffaw at the unseen in Psalm 34:7, *"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them."*

Here is a consideration of the case in point. In antiquity, Samaria was under siege by the Syrians. The prophet Elisha's helper was distraught at the overwhelming numbers of the enemy until the prophet prayed for God to open his eyes so that he might see what the prophet saw. There encircling the area were the angelic armies of heaven. He then heard Elisha say, *"Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them"* 2 Kings 6:16. They were invisible to the natural eye, but very, very real. Thus is the saving, keeping, and teaching power of God in the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, by this power of the Almighty, He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him. Heb, 7:25.

Thank God for an everlasting, know-so salvation. You cannot see it, but it is very real. Additionally, it is the will of God that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. Of course, these are matters of faith that are hidden from the natural man, but revealed to all who trust in Christ Jesus and walk in His Holy Word.

Does this make sense to you, dear reader? Does the real, but invisible power of the Creator God live in you and empower you through understanding of His Holy Word? The time is soon coming when that will be unimaginably important

FOR THOUGHT: Name some of the things you use, even depend upon, each day, but do not see? Is it too much then to believe the Creator Who tells us in His Word that we are not alone? If the Holy Spirit was the energetic force that created the universe, could that same invisible power move human hearts? Has your heart been touched and drawn to Jesus?

IS THE DAY OF CHRIST AT HAND?

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;" 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

Without doubt, iniquity (religious activity beyond the bounds of the teaching of the Holy Word) is reaching its apex in this generation. Because iniquity abounds, the love of many is evaporating, Matt. 24:12. Thus, there is much talk in church circles regarding the nearness of the Day of the Lord. Most equate the phrase "Day of the Lord" to mean the return of Christ to catch away His bride, but those two things are not synonymous (close but not synonymous). Think with me about what the Bible is actually saying about this subject.

"The Day of the Lord," or "That Day," as it is sometimes called, is a reference to the millennial reign of Christ on this earth. The "one thousand years as a day" finds its roots in the Apostle Peter's mention of time as it is reckoned by the Lord. It also fits as the fulfillment of typology set in creation: six days to labor, and the seventh day is for rest. Man is given six days to fulfill his purpose on earth (6,000 years), but the seventh day (1,000 years) is the day of rest from the world and its iniquity. It is the righteous reign of Christ Jesus on earth.

Inasmuch as Adam was created approximately 6,000 years ago, it would appear that mankind has had his six days to fulfill his purpose. Surely the seventh day is near. But some ill informed folks had apparently led the church at Thessalonica to believe that the day would come in their lifetime. Thus does the scripture enlighten not only them, but all of God's people down through the ages with certain specifics. Before Jesus actually returns to earth the following will happen:

First, there will be an apostasy; that is, a turning away from believing and practicing the truth as set forth in the Holy Word. It is obvious that churches are well into the decimation stage. Many have little to no active members under retirement age, and soon their church will not exist at all unless God intervenes in some way. Youth are not following in the steps of faith of their parents. This will worsen, doubtlessly, but that criteria is literally being seen presently.

Second, there will come about the revealing of the man of sin, the son of perdition. He is described in 2 Thess. 2. God's people generally think of him as the ultimate antichrist. It is after he has his terrible time of destruction that Jesus literally returns bodily to the earth to judge and to set up His millennial kingdom: the Day of the Lord. Truly, blessed are those who are ready to enjoy that marvelous day of peace with Him. They shall see Jesus as He is because they will be immortal, incorruptible. . . like Him

FOR THOUGHT: Bible prophecy and history point to the extreme nearness of the end of this age. Do you see the marginalization of strict biblical Christianity? Do you notice a propensity of people generally to reject biblical conversations? What is the basis on which some churches are growing in number? Are church members actually learning and growing spiritually, or simply practicing religious unchanging ritual?

ISRAEL: WHOSE LAND IS IT?

"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Galatians 3:16.

Visits to middle eastern countries early in my ministry empowered teaching, preaching, and writing about those places. They live in reminiscence helping certain lessons to come alive. There is a story of one witnessing occasion in Israel which has underscored an important truth through the years. If readers thought by these lines I was going to share it, they are correct.

On one trip, things were so politically sticky that there had to be an Israeli guide on board the vehicle in charge of destinations and information. In predominantly Arab places, an Arab guide was in charge. Sometimes, both would be present when travel included both areas. The Arab guide proudly spoke of the significance of monuments and places. He also emphasized that this land belonged to his Arab people since they were the descendants of Abraham.

When the Jewish guide was in charge, he spoke of the marvelous advancement his people had given the land since 1948. He went on to say that this land belonged to the Jewish people since it was their long ancestral home, and it was given to them by Abraham through Isaac. It was interesting. In a brief period of silence, I spoke to them asking again about ownership of the land. Each reaffirmed such ownership as they had previously stated. They were both wrong. The truth of the matter is that the land was promised to the seed of Abraham through Isaac. And in the words of Paul, God said not seeds as of many, but as of one, and that seed is Christ Jesus. Therefore those who are in Christ are the inheritors of the land. Well, one can imagine: that bit of theology went over like a ton of bricks crossing the Atlantic. But it made for a most interesting and provocative conversation. Perhaps no one had brought that to their attention, at least in that way. But it is nevertheless true.

The time is not far away when the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ. His church which has borne the heat of the age in good testimony will inherit with Him, moreover we shall be the inheritance to Him as well.

A number of scriptures in the Old Testament, particularly in Isaiah speak of the details of that marvelous Day of our Lord. On that day, the full promise of boundaries will be given to God's people. Additionally, they shall rule and reign with Him in a curse-removed earth for a thousand years of peace that will bring unparalleled prosperity and goodness to the whole earth, and to myriads of people multiplied on it. It will be an environment free of satanic influence and extended human life. All will enjoy astronomical agricultural abundance. On that day from pole to pole, and wherever east meets west, the land will be freed from the curse of sin, and blessed for everyone! "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

FOR THOUGHT: Have you studied the land grant God promised to Abraham's seed to find it much larger than the land currently occupied by Israel? When do you think that land grant will be honored? Do you believe what Paul told the churches of Galatia, that the real inheritor of the Abrahamic promise is Christ Jesus? How does that affect you as participating in the inheritance?

IT SHOULD BE IN THE BIBLE!

"Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Titus 2:14

I am very certain there is good reason, perhaps known only to God the Author, but one wonders just why the word "Enthusiasm" is not in the Bible. Think about it!

The word consists of three parts: "En" (in); "Thus," (God), and "Ism" (the noun ending denoting state of being). Hence, "enthusiasm" literally means, "The state of being in God." But what is commonly associated with the term? It is excitement, energy. Is that not what one finds in a close relationship with God? Surely it is! So much the more, then why the word should be in the Bible, at least to the mind of this writer.

However, there are words in the Bible that are synonyms of "Enthusiasm." Words such as "Fervent," "Zeal," "Zealous." These words come from the ancient Koine Greek term "Zeo" meaning boiling liquids or glowing hot metals.

Illustrated from childhood experience, a small amount of turpentine dabbed on a cat's behind would cause the animal to erupt into a racing, super speed. It was a show and tell demonstration of enthusiasm. But that is far afield from what the term should mean, and its synonyms do mean in the Bible.

Enthusiasm in spiritual matters is not self induced excitement or an attempt to create enthusiasm by that means. Such is easily seen and diagnosed. The problem is that it is false, and in reverse of the true process. Enthusiasm in proper spiritual matters may indeed spill over into physical expressions. True happiness shows, and it is detected as being genuine.

So, how may one come to possess a high degree of excitement, and joy that is associated with the term "enthusiasm?" How about simply engaging in the activity that the term specifically denotes? "The state of being in God." There is no other way to know this blessed state than a specific, complete surrender to God as personal Creator, Redeemer, Savior, Lord. As the writer of Hebrews pointedly noted, *"He that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*

When sobriety claims the mind and heart; when knowledge of one's natural state permeates the mind; when realizing the presence of the new birth, and opening the divine presents of faith, hope, love; when basking in the myriad promises so applicable both here and hereafter of peace beyond understanding, then a resounding "Praise the Lord" and "Amen!" will not be sufficient expressions of the soul. Moreover, those will be expressions of enthusiasm that are genuine and acceptable to the saints, and to the One Who gave it!

FOR THOUGHT: Some folks work at being enthusiastic, and some are enthusiastic without working at it. Do you notice the difference? How does each case impress you? Do you think a truly enthusiastic, Christian life is predicated on much study and meditation in God's Word?

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME

Various media emit a virtual flood of vile information every day about the sins running rampant in this generation. It is not that they are new, quite the contrary, they are almost as old as mankind. But they are multiplied thousands of times over in number and intensity as the age draws to a close. Moreover, the commonality of them all is summed up as "It's all about me." Think with me about this!

One predominating problem is abortion. Why does it exist? It is all about me: what I want, and I will murder to get it! Another is sexual perversion. Homos want acceptance in society the same as hetero-sexual folks. Moreover, men want to become women, and women want to become men. Women want to mate with women, and men want to mate with men. In Disney terms: when Mickey prefers Donald over Minnie, that's Goofy! Why is this? It is all about me! Still another is the abandonment of responsibility. Whatever may happen, it is somebody else's fault. Families are abandoned; little children left to whomever may have a heart of compassion for them. Why? It is all about me!

The list goes on. There is addiction to alcohol and various other drugs. People will lie, steal, and even kill to get a temporary high from their drug of choice. Why? It is all about me! Then enter the quest for material success. Nothing, but nothing must get in the way of material success. It does not matter who is hurt, stepped on, abandoned or thrown overboard. It is all about me! Oh, how about political socialism? As the government dismantles traditional America, masses applaud at the prospect of skimming off the cream of the labors of others as a supposed right. It does not matter if what I have is a tort from those who have prepared themselves, and labored hard for what they have. I want it! Give it to me, and I will vote for you! Why is this? It is simple. It is all about me!

Enter the world of religion. "The teachings of that book called the Bible are just too harsh. It makes me feel bad. It cramps my style. I want a religion that relates to me in my selfish, sinful pursuits. I will take such a religion if it suits me, or leave it if it doesn't. After all, it's all about me!"

Well, this is the world today. But it is not new. It all happened before in the days of Noah, and to it the totally corrupt society of the world is destined to return, because it wants a world devoid of the righteous, Creator God. It is by His grace that they shall have it for a short time, but their arrogant selfishness shall soon turn to cries for rocks of the mountains to fall upon them and hide them from the face of Him who comes. Rev. 6:15-16. I believe all men should understand this and prepare by living in accord with the Word.

FOR THOUGHT: In the ruination of individuals and of society, what can compare to the sin of selfishness? What are you doing to benefit others? Is there a greater benefit or blessing you could be to others than living a credible Christian life before them?

IT'S ALL ABOUT ME! #2

Some folks believe that trusting Jesus, and becoming His disciple is a surrendering of life, and its potential to a static life of religion. Oh, how the devil delights in spreading that lie! The truth is in Christ, and in Christ life really is all about me! Think with me about this.

Why did God leave heaven and become a man? It was to fulfill the types and promises of the Old Testament, and to pay the penalty of sins on behalf of mankind. He did this for me! You see, it really is all about me!

Why did He provide an everlasting salvation for all who repent of sins, and trust Him as personal Savior, especially me? Oh, yes, it is all about me!

Why did He create the living organism known as His body, the church? He did it that I might learn of Him, grow in grace and knowledge. Yes, it is all about me! I Timothy 2:4 declares that God will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. That includes me!

Did He not promise His dear children new life, and a new, incorruptible body, even me? Oh, yes! It is about me!

Does He not give me the opportunity to mature in the faith once delivered to the saints? Will that not qualify me to rule and reign with Him in the age that is about to happen? Does this include me? Indeed! It is all about me!

Will He show me how an entire universe may be destroyed and return to the unseen state? Will I truly be allowed to view this? Sure enough, it is all about me!

I have the opportunity to see how creation is done. Because once resurrected I will ever be with the Lord. I will have a bird's eye view of the creation of new heavens and a new earth! Hallelujah, it is all about me!

Who then will get to live in New Jerusalem on the new earth? It will be his disciples of every age, and that includes me! It is indeed all about me!

Who then has the joy of studying, praying, coalescing the rightly divided Word that takes one from mountaintop to mountaintop? Among others, it is me! Thank the Lord it really is about me!

Dear reader this is for you, too. I claim all these blessings for myself within the constraints of the Blessed Word of God. I hope you will, too.

FOR THOUGHT: Some folks think the idea of being a Christian is "Give, give, give!" Have you considered Christianity to be a "Get, get, get" religion, and that even giving is getting? Do you find great joy as a Christian both in giving and getting that excels things done in the flesh?

JEHOVAH IS MY PASTOR

Some years ago, I accompanied a small group of pastor friends to the city of Saltillo, Mexico. The purpose of the trip was to encourage a mission church and gather the necessary information with a view toward extending building funds. While there, some hours of each day was spent in the home of the native missionary who together with his devoted wife were delightful hosts.

Conspicuous on a living room wall hung a poster that caught my attention. It read, "Jehovah is my Pastor!" This was taken from Psalm 23:1, and is a common translation of the Hebrew into Spanish. Of course, in English it is customarily written, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

The Hebrew word translated Shepherd is "Ro-i" from the root word "Ra-ah." The placement of "Jehovah" with this word makes one of the most beloved names of God known among Bible students: "Jehovah-roi." "The Lord is my Shepherd."

But the Spanish translation prefers the term "Pastor" to "Shepherd" in this case, and that is what arrested attention and precipitated considerable thought.

"Pastor" and "Shepherd" really are synonyms. The value of this fact often appears to be lost in modern church life, but should be re-discovered.

Pastors/shepherds are not new to the New Testament since God raised up men in Old Testament times who were so known. Their flock consisted of the covenant people of God in certain locales. Pastor/shepherds have weighty responsibility for spiritual oversight of their flocks.

Today, the covenant people of God are known as New Testament churches over whom God has raised up under-shepherds to feed the sheep with spiritual food, and to watch for their spiritual safety and well being. Pastors are not the prime directors of churches, but churches themselves stand as the covenant people of God. Pastors are not the shepherds, but are sheep who are under-shepherds; who are to follow, and who will answer to, THE SHEPHERD of the sheep, John 10. In this relationship there is comfort and joy. Seen any other way produces misery and failure. The Spanish translation remains my favorite: "Jehovah is my Pastor!"

FOR THOUGHT: List some of the ways that a shepherd of literal sheep, and a pastor of a church are similar. List some of the ways they are not similar. How do you think spiritual shepherds (pastors) are to conduct themselves as "Shepherds of the sheep?"

JUSTIFIED: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE “BE”

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” Romans 4:5

Justification, sanctification, holiness, and righteousness are Bible terms that often intertwine as they denote the wonderful state and/or character of saved sinners as they appear before God through faith in the “once for all” works of Christ Jesus. Think with me about it!

To be declared as justified does not mean to be declared as being innocent. Rather it means to be declared right over and above guilt by a just and acceptable basis. For example a person taking the life of another might be declared justified by a court of law on the basis of self defense. In the all important matters of life and eternity, there is only one justifier of the created, and that is the Creator Himself. W.E. Vine in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words states, “Ideally the complete fulfillment of the Law of God would provide a basis of justification in His sight, Rom. 2:13 But no such case has occurred in mere human experience, and therefore no one can be justified on this ground. . . [God] is the Justifier of him that hath faith in Jesus, Rom. 5:26, justification being the legal and formal acquittal from guilt by God as Judge, the pronouncement of the sinner as righteous, who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ.” So did Christ Jesus as God and as man fulfill the Law to the last jot and tittle, took it out of the way and enabled believers past, present, and future to be justified in Him. So, then, is the spirit of believing men justified, sanctified, and sealed by the Holy Spirit of God upon repentance and faith in Christ Jesus as personal Savior. Eph. 4:30.

However, man is more than a spirit. He has a body and a mind-life. There is no hope for the body in earthly life. It must die. But men are left on earth following spiritual salvation that they might learn of the righteousness of Christ Jesus, and incorporate His teaching into their own conscious thinking and actions, Such is a learning process that brings them into a high state of maturity, and qualifies them for the reward of bridal relationship with Jesus, and that of ruling and reigning with Him in the next age that is about to happen. Obedience to His teachings beginning in baptism and continuing in church fellowship, and in the admonitions of Holy Writ produces sanctification and justification of the mind-life all of which are directly attributable to, and impossible without, the substitutionary payment for sin by Jesus on the cross.

There is much to gain in pursuing the justified, transformed life by the renewing of the mind, Rom. 12:1-3. There is also much to lose in failing that pursuit. 2 John 8. Have you been declared just by receiving Christ Jesus into your heart? If so, then hotly pursue justification of life in His teachings! Justification, it is an important Bible :Be!”

FOR THOUGHT: Justification of life is achieved through the process of sanctification. What have you done that allows God to set your life apart (sanctify it) in His sight? Everybit of spiritual knowledge learned and followed are steps in sanctification. Are you learning? Following?

KNOW THE MAP OF LIFE

The great cross-country auto race was lining up, as the story goes. Each car was occupied by a driver and a navigator. The 1500 mile race would take them through variant terrain and elevation, as well as in urban and remote environments. On the second day of the race one car was far ahead; so far that no others were in sight. It was then that an unmarked crossroads appeared without any clear signs of which one was the road of the route. The driver turned to the navigator, and asked which road they should take. The navigator replied that he did not know. When asked why he did not know, he replied that he was so sure that they would not be in the lead that they could safely follow the others, that he failed to study the route for himself.

Oh, I know what you are thinking: That is unthinkable, even outright stupid! Well, hold on! That may be true, but dare we take a look at a parallel, but much bigger and more important scenario? Think with me!

In spite of the babblings of so many eggheads of pseudoscience, each member of our species is a creation of the Divine Architect of the universe. Each living person on the planet has been admitted to the race of life with definitive purpose and directives. Moreover, it is given that the information so vital may be known and understood, and starting with step one, followed to a victorious finish with Creator commendations.

Now, let's see: We are at a crossroads. Which way should we go? What are we to believe? What are we to do? How should we live? What is our story to tell to the nations? Please don't tell me you failed to read the directions, and were counting on following the crowd. Oh, those directions: What, and where are they? They are combined in a very neat, concise package called The Holy Bible (doubtless there is one or more of them in your home). There are sixty-six books bound between those covers. If you have not read at least thirty-three of them at least once, just what is your excuse for taking up space on the planet other than contributing to the overall working of antichrist? And, if you have read that much at least once, then you know Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. But have you embarked on that narrow road, or are you still at the crossroads, still a follower of the crowds, and sure to be a loser in the race.

Today is the accepted time of correcting the course. God loves you so much! He is not willing that you should perish, but that you should come to Him in repentance of sin, and gain the knowledge of the truth. I emphatically affirm these things are true.

FOR THOUGHT: What is your excuse for not knowing the Bible? People will spend years in higher education to prepare for a career, but careers are short-lived, and eternity is very long. Do you know the way? Are you striving for spiritual maturity that you might rule and reign with Christ in the age that is about to happen?

LAGNIAPPE AND CRYSTAL WEDDING OATS

"And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" John 1:16.

"Lagniappe" is a French word pronounced (lan-yap) that is well known in pockets of French culture such as Louisiana, South Arkansas, Quebec, Canada, etc. It means "A little something extra" as a favor from a merchant to a customer or something thrown in for good measure. In the little community of my childhood, it was always a practice, and in some areas, it is a custom presently.

This recalls corporate practice in childhood as well. We did not purchase much at stores beyond absolute necessities, but when it came to breakfast food, washing detergents, and cow feed, four things determined choice. In breakfast cereals it was always Crystal Wedding oats and Nabisco shredded wheat, because there was a nice crystal-like drinking glass in every box. These lined our shelves. In every box of washing detergent there was a nice, free dish cloth. These filled cabinet drawers. In cereal, I begged my parents to buy Nabisco Shredded Wheat. I hated the stuff, but there were illustrated "Straight Arrow" cards separating the wheat loaves that taught me how to build an Indian shelter out in the woods. Finally, in cow feed, every gingham type sack of 100 pounds of feed must be clean and not torn because we would be wearing it as a shirt from momma's hands very soon. What wonderful "Extras!"

"Lagniappe!" What a good and helpful practice it was to poor families recovering from the Great Depression. It brings to mind the great goodness of our Savior. He loves us so much that He died to save us. Moreover, all who call upon Him in repentance find that gift of salvation in full power as it was at the beginning.

However, if that were not enough, it goes on and on from that initial gift. His spirit guides us and illuminates us to the marvelous truth of His Word. The resultant peace beyond understanding, promises that are staggering, and comprehension of the harmony, unity, and symmetry of His ingested Word renews the mind, and implants an insatiable desire to know more, and to receive their fulfillment.

FOR THOUGHT: Have you ever been given a little something extra in a trade? Have you given something extra to others? What are some of the extras, in addition to salvation, that God gives to people who trust Him? List some!

LAUDING THE LOLLARDS

The intensity of the dark age largely escapes the attention and understanding of modern Christians, but in its darkness came the light of life in one determined to open God's Word to the common man in England. His name was John Wycliffe and his followers were dubbed "Lollards." Their influence has been noted as the dawn of the Protestant Reformation.

John Wycliffe's life spanned most of the fourteenth century. He was a noted scholar, priest of the Roman Catholic Church, and was connected to Oxford University for many years. As such, he created friends in high places, and wielded significant influence.

Wycliffe got his hook hung on the Holy Word. He saw the sins of the Roman Church, and declared no biblical authority for the papacy. He decried the entrenchment of power hungry clergy of his day.

Wycliffe set his hand to translate the Bible into the English vernacular. He often translated small portions, a chapter or two, or a book or two, and had helpers to laboriously copy the scripts, and distribute them throughout England. These scribes and distributors were called Lollards. This activity soon brought the wrath of the entrenched clergy, and the powers of Rome upon him, but he escaped imprisonment and persecution by means of influential friends that often came to his aid. Still, Wycliffe succeeded in becoming a major enemy of the church of darkness whose wrath would not die with his own.

Wycliffe died in 1384, but the Anti-Wycliffe Statue of 1401 sought to reclaim and reaffirm Roman authority in all ecclesiastical matters. It banned Wycliffe's writings and extended persecution to his followers.

As a result of this ongoing determination to extinguish the light of the Word, a Council declared Wycliffe a heretic. Additionally, he was retroactively excommunicated. His body was exhumed, burned, and his ashes scattered into the river.

Some of Wycliffe's theological views and doctrinal beliefs would not be accepted as true today, especially by Bible believing Baptists, but a study of his life is so worthy of one's time. Moreover, when one considers the theological quagmire from which he arose, and the sacrifice he made to expose the Bible to the common man, it brings a sense of gratitude and thankfulness for him and his Lollards. It also underscores that the powers of darkness still exist, and whoever opens his heart and mind to serious study of the eternal Word will suffer persecution. But such is greater identity with the God of the Bible, and the best of all possible preparations for the unavoidable day of meeting Him one on one, face to face. I thank God for the Lollards!

FOR THOUGHT: In the days recalled in this article, Baptists, or Anabaptists as they were then known, were outlawed in many countries including England. They existed, but always beneath the radar of the powers that were. Wycliffe and his Lollards were a blessing to England and doubtless an encouragement and motivator to William Tyndale.

LEGACY OF LITTLE SODBURY

Several miles outside of London, England there is a centuries old estate largely intact to this day. It is a farm with a large two-story stucco-like, castle-resembling structure. Among the rooms upstairs is one furnished as it appeared several hundred years ago. I was privileged to visit that room in 1985. It was here that William Tyndale did much of the translation work of the Bible into English. The significance of this is readily apparent to most students of history, and particularly of the Bible. Please continue to read!

In the early 16th century, it was illegal for all but clergy to have access to the Bible, and none existed in the English language. That was just the way Catholicism and the powers of England wanted it. William Tyndale, a highly educated linguistic scholar lamented the English people being deprived of God's Word. Accordingly, he spent much time in seclusion at Little Sodbury the home of nobleman John Walsh, translating the Bible into English. He was well aware that this could get him burned at the stake, but in his determination said to an opposing priest, *"If God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scriptures than thou dost."*

Tyndale spent most of his years in hiding to accomplish his work. His first New Testament of six thousand copies was printed in Germany. Later he worked on the Old Testament. Much of his work constituted the Geneva Bible, largely preferred by Baptists for the next two centuries. Indeed, much of the King James Version of the scriptures that finally came about in the early 17th century is the translation work of William Tyndale. As expected, his work brought the wrath of King Henry VIII upon him. He was finally located and imprisoned. After over a year in prison, he was burned at the stake near Oxford University. His last words were: "Lord, open the king of England's eyes."

To possess reliable copies of God's Word; to possess freedom in a democratic republic form of government are both tremendous blessings for which the giving of thanks should never end. The world pays no attention, but those who know give thanks to God for William Tyndale, and for the legacy of Little Sodbury. Both he and it speak of worship, and service around the Word as prime directives of life which pale any importance of a din, noisy, fleeting, impoverishing, destroying, and material world. Blessed indeed are those who leave a legacy of love for the eternal Word, and its advancement in the lives of others.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you know that the Church of England is merely Catholic, but severed from Rome by King Henry VIII? Do you humbly breathe a prayer of thanks for men such as Tyndale, Wycliff and others who paid with their life for sharing God's Word in English?

LIFE SAVING LOGIC

In the annals of long ago, Samaria was besieged by the superior military forces of Syria. The city was locked down until food and water was gone. Cannibalism and urine became the despicable diet together with bird droppings, and other such things. It was man's insurmountable catastrophe, but God's opportunity. 2 Kings 6-7. You really ought to stop and read these chapters right now. Through His prophet God promised food in abundance for sale, cheap, the next day. The king's financier scoffed, but four starving lepers reasoned most logically and profoundly. They would escape the starving city since there were none to make food available to them. Perhaps the enemy would have compassion on them; maybe not. But if they were killed by the enemy, it would be quicker than the slow starvation they were experiencing.

So off they went. Now God caused the armies of the enemy to hear an approaching army that really was not there. However they ran for their lives, leaving tents, food, animals, etc. What a joy it was to the lepers to find this bonanza. They were so happy, they gathered food, clothing, money, etc., and buried them. Then they also yielded to logic again. "We do not well," they told themselves. People in Samaria are on the brink of death from starvation, and here is an abundance of food.

Consequently, they ran to spread the good news. People were so desperate, and ecstatic that they stampeded, running over the skeptics and doubters, and before the day was done food was for sale cheap in the gate of the city. It is a nice story, but does it hold any application for folks who are now thousands of years into the future?

Consider that the enemy of sin surrounds and invades every person. By it each one is to die, not just physically, but also spiritually. The good news is that there is life flowing outwardly from the camp of the enemy where the blessed Lord Jesus was crucified to pay the penalty of sin. He also provides sustaining knowledge, and hope to those who will receive His free gift. My friend, one thing is certain. If you continue to do nothing, you will experience eternal death. If those of us who have found the Lord precious seek to hoard, and hide His blessing, we do not well, and we will pay a tremendous price for it at His coming. Hear then the lifesaving logic of the lepers. Let us cast ourselves on the mercy of Him who can save us, and let us share the good news that others may be saved as well.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you see the parallel between the lepers and Christians today? Do you think shirking our privilege and duty to fellow men will bring great condemnation to us? Do you understand that Christians have a command, but the lepers did not?

LIGHT BULB LEADERS

“And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him.” Exodus 24:30

In a world of conflicting presentations of religion, it would appear that each seeks to convince everyone else that his bulb is brightest. Some are bent on extinguishing all other bulbs around them to emphasize the brightness of their own. They forget that blowing out the candle of another does not make their own burn any brighter. But such is the state of spiritual affairs as the age rushes to its climax and subsequent close.

It is interesting to note that the brightest bulb is that which burns with the light from the Father of Lights. Such was the radiance of Moses. Although personally unaware of the brightness of the skin of his face as he descended Mt. Sinai, he was soon to learn that his brethren could not steadfastly behold him. That brightness radiating from his skin after meeting with the Great Creator, Redeemer God was blinding. That brightness was symbolic of the ultimate truth they received from God through Moses, and foreshadowed the tremendous light of Christ Jesus, and the New Testament faith once delivered to the saints.

To be sure, the modern-day, Christian world is a world of light bulb leaders. The problem is that too many of them burn with a self-generated brightness destined to fade into obscurity when exposed to that light which is from heaven. Nothing quite rectifies the charade of self-generated lights like the readiness of God's people to “let their little light shine!” Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”* John 8:12. His is a light that shall not be extinguished, nor driven into obscurity by the self-generated lights of designing men. His assurance of this is summarized in a simple, but profound verse of scripture, Matt. 5:14, *“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.”* In a world of self-generated light bulb leaders, it is this non-extinguishable light the whole world needs to see! Is your light brightly burning in the candlestick, or is it hidden under a basket?

FOR THOUGHT: Great crowds may be attracted to self-burning lights, but what have they learned about the contents of the unified, symmetrical, non-contradictory Bible? Do you have a vision of the plan of God with man or do you see the Bible as a library of mixed up teachings?

LOOKING FOR ANTICHRIST (In The Wrong Direction)

From the days of the Great Depression in the 1930s to the late 1940s following WWII, life changed very little in the tiny village of my birth. Most folks did well to eek out a living from truck patch gardening, and harvesting the products of milk cows, hogs, and chickens. Many worked in local strip coal mining that abounded in Sebastian County, Arkansas. Consequently, the Bible was largely held in high esteem, and a fearful looking for Antichrist was widespread. One major problem with that was they were looking for Antichrist in all the wrong directions.

The war caused rationing of goods, and services needed for its support. Then, it was not uncommon to hear about rationing stamps for sugar, gasoline, and auto parts to be the "Mark of the Beast," produced by Antichrist. The next cry was over social security numbers.

Also, in those days, and especially in that place, there was no comprehension of Biblical heresy beyond the sawdust and tent meetings of holiness type folks with their emotional melt down, speaking in tongues. The inroads of universalism, and ecumenism were unknown. So, was the vast importance of the Lord's New Testament Church, and the role it must play in the heat of the last days. With cornfield plowing preachers filling the pulpit every first or fourth Sunday, and focus largely restricted to getting folks saved, the religious comfort zone of the times was largely undisturbed. Of course, this is the recall of a child growing up during those days.

The term "Antichrist" is found several times in the epistles of John. He emphasized that ". . . even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time." I John 2:18.

To John in his day, it was the denial that Jesus was the Christ, and that He had come. That and kindred denials have grown exponentially. It is enlightening to consider that "Christ" is a Greek work transliterated rather than translated into English. It means "Anointed." In the New Testament, two entities have been anointed: the Head of the body, and the body of the Head. That is: Jesus, the head of His body, the church, was anointed by the Holy Spirit at His baptism. It was appropriate then that His body which He put together in His earthly ministry should also be anointed if it is to carry on, and represent Him throughout the age. That anointing of the body occurred at Pentecost, Act 2.

Therefore, counterfeit churches that oppose the teachings of the faith once delivered to the saints are in fact antichrist meaning those that are against the teachings and work of the anointed body. Folks of a generation ago were right to look for the work of Antichrist, but most of them were looking in the wrong direction. If the apostle John were to return to the 21st Century, I wonder how he would describe the myriad of anti-anointed ones or antichrists, abound presently. They abound as prophesied!

FOR THOUGHT: The Lord's churches are to learn, believe, and propagate the faith once delivered to the saints. How will those churches fare when they stand before the Lord and give account? Did you know that "Christ" and "Messiah" mean the same thing: "Anointed"? If the Lord's church was anointed on Pentecost, Acts 2, then the term "Christ" applies to it. (Not in the same way it applies to the Head, Jesus), but its teachings must remain true to the teachings of Jesus. Therefore to be against that faith is to be "antichrist" as John repeatedly mentions in his epistles. Does this make sense to you? Why? Why not?

LOVING: A HIGH PRIORITY BIBLE “BE”

It is without controversy due to millenniums of experience and Holy Spirit inspired declaration: the greatest spiritual gift of God to man is love! I Cor. 13:13. As an unbroken pattern woven into the tapestry of history, it shines as the crowned virtue: the ultimate overcomer. In Matt. 5:44-46. Jesus said, *“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?”* It is of little wonder then that love is exalted in Holy Writ as the prime motivation, and winning strategy in the conflict of the ages. Please review this. and rejoice as you think with me!

It is love that motivates God to engage in the great conflict to bring about the ultimate defeat of sin, death, and hell. Nothing could be clearer as stated in John 3:16. It is pure love, beyond the comprehension of mankind that led the Creator-God to become one of us and to affix his eternal destiny in the victory He would procure for members of the repenting race.

Additionally, it is love that led God in human form to shed His Holy blood not only in redemption of fallen man, but in the purchase of His newly formed and established holy body: the church, Acts 20:28. Moreover, it is love through which proper evangelistic and missionary efforts are launched, and by which stormy seas of life are successfully sailed to the predestined harbor of victorious rest. Is it any wonder then that to love God with all of one's being, and that supremely is the first commandment, and to love thy neighbor as thyself, the second one? Matt. 22:37-39

Furthermore, it is love that identifies the true disciples of Christ to the world at large as Jesus said, *“Hereby shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another.”* John 13:35. The apostle John wrote in exclamatory words in his first epistle 3:1, *“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God...”*

Truly, it is a good thing for all of God's people to pray for increased love, then submerge themselves in the Word of Love to realize the answer to that prayer. Should one wonder at this most exalted of all spiritual gifts, far superior to charisma gifts of early New Testament times, the answer to such wonder will be settled forever in the biblical explanation so adamantly penned in I John 4:7,8,10: *“... GOD IS LOVE ...”* Successful Christians are loving people. They know it is an important Bible “Be!”

LUNA TUNE OF AN INFERRING OBSERVER

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun," Psalm 19:1-4

The handiwork of the Creator is still the most mesmerizing of wonders of the universe. I refer specifically to a full moon on a clear night. On the 17th day of October, I awakened early and donned shoes for a usual early morning walk long before dawn (I sleep in warmups). The approximate mile and a half walk yielded beautiful patterns of silhouettes highlighted by golden moonbeams from the cosmic center stage. It is hard to look away.

The moon is known in scientific circles as the lunar satellite of our terrestrial ball. One may speak of a lunar day, a lunar cycle, a lunar eclipse, but those who gaze at it or study it are sometimes referred to as Lunatics. Although more base connotations have been associated with that word, it still claims a higher sense in those who appreciate its arresting presence in nighttime domination. I confess to being one in the latter sense.

Blessed to live in Central Arkansas, there is no shortage of large trees of abundant foliage. In the early morning walk, they create a variety of darkened frames to enhance the fascinating picture that is as brilliant as it was on the morning of its creation.

Walking on, as the ornate, golden disk sunk lower in the western sky, from somewhere a couple of fluffy clouds found a place beneath it. It is as though they were making a soft bed for the giant luminary at the end of its nightly patrol. Soon, the gold began to change into silver as the ever broadening eastern sky grew brighter, and brighter, announcing the king of the solar system, and the source of lunar light moving in cosmic precision to soon appear over the horizon. The gladness of daylight permeated the valleys and hills; shadows fled away. It was a new day of glorious morning beauty that God had made. Flora and Fauna alike stirred to their tasks in the new measure of time.

One can but wonder, if prone to animate the heavenly neighbor, just how many meteorites have pocketed its surface in the millenniums of its patrol; does it ever tire of its repeated mission of blessing creation and glorifying the Creator. And what is the number of the hosts of earth who have stood at least momentarily spellbound by it in its never-ending testimony of both.

Adam saw this glorious owner of the night and marveled. Abraham looked to it often. Aaron knew the sight; Adonijah, Amos, and Andrew (just to keep things parallel) beheld its beauty and testimony. But for that night, that moment, that view was mine. It was mine to revel in its beauty; to be humbled by its presence; to be thankful for its Creator, and to know that in the cosmic arrangement of things we both have a purpose to fulfill that came from the same Creator. I can only wish I were as faithful to mine as it is to its own.

FOR THOUGHT: Creation speaks (Psalm 19) but do you have a hearing ear to its voice? If so, what is the message it is telling you? If you hear it, what are you doing about it?

MAN OF SORROWS, ACQUAINTED WITH GRIEF (A Christmas Observation)

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” Isaiah 53:3. Thus is the description of Jesus recorded by the prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years before He was born. How miserably do the words fail to convey the depth of anguish, sorrow, suffering, pain, and shame that was to characterize the life of our Creator/Savior. Consider it.

Within the first two years of his life on earth, He was taken to Egypt to escape the mortal wrath of Herod. From Bethlehem went up a cry of pain and anguish unparalleled from that city as all the little boys were ripped from mothers’ arms, and slain by Roman soldiers due to the evil ego of Herod, who wanted Him dead. Sorrow and grief!

Early in His ministry, the good, religious folks of Nazareth sought to cast Him off a cliff, but he eluded them. Sorrow and Grief!

He came unto His own, but His own received Him not. Sorrow and Grief!

He reached out to His countrymen with goodness never before seen: healing the sick, restoring the blind; raising the dead; presenting to them the good news of the Kingdom of Heaven being at hand, but to no avail: Sorrow and Grief!

He pressed the terms of righteousness against the forces of sin and evil which led to an impossible situation: that one without sin should die. Sorrow and Grief!

In prayer, He sweat as, it were, great drops of blood as He obediently surrendered to “Not my will, but thine be done.” Sorrow and Grief!

He, without sin, took the sins of the world upon Himself, thus enabling Him to be subject to cruel punishment and death: Sorrow and grief!

His crown was of thorns; His flesh flayed to reveal His bones; His beard was ripped from his face: Sorrow and Grief!

He was left by heavenly powers, and in His own surrendered will, to die alone on the most hideous instrument of death: a Roman cross: Sorrow and Grief!

For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, despising the shame: Sorrow and grief!

Now, how do you see the Babe of Bethlehem’s manger? “*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.*” 2 Cor. 8:9. Hallelujah! This is the real meaning of Christmas!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe that Jesus suffered more than any man? Do you realize that he bore your sins in His own body on the cross? Have you accepted what He did for you by receiving Him as your personal Savior? Does Jesus have the focal prominence due Him in your celebration of Christmas?

MATTHEW 5:22 AND THE IDEA OF APOSTASY!

Apostasy simply means abandoning the faith, the doctrines of Christ. In some denominations of churches it is understood as losing one's spiritual salvation. That possibility is rejected as being biblically impossible, but is here dealt with in that definition for teaching purposes. It is the multiple-emphasized declaration of the Holy Word that salvation is everlasting. Still some have trouble with such passages as Matthew 5:22, *"But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."*

The context of the verse is set in verse one of the chapter. It is the inaugural message of Jesus to His newly called out church. The burden of the message is the difference between the Old Covenant and the New one. As He spoke about personal relationships, this verse that is problematic to some is spoken. The idea of judgment is not a problem; the idea of the council is not a problem, but to be put in danger of hell fire for using the label "fool" to a brother is a problem largely left alone for want of understanding. The exposition of its meaning is herewith offered as true and harmonious with the non-contradictory nature of the Holy Word.

The problematic terminology is "in danger of hell fire." A survey of the original language of the scriptures shows this "hell fire" to be an English translation of the Greek word "Gehenna." The hell fire to which unbelievers, the devil, and his minions will be assigned is "Hades," "Hell" in the Koine Greek of the New Testament. It is a place that born again people can never experience because theirs is the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, "Gehenna" is the name of the city dump of Jerusalem. In it were discarded all things of no intrinsic value to be consumed by fire.

If one can say to his brother (spiritual brother in Christ; remember the context) you are a fool; a moron for living as you do in/for Him, then it is open proof that the value system of life of the one so saying is so far afield from God, and the teachings of Holy Writ that such life will be lost in the judgment fires of God when ALL His people stand before Him, 2 Cor. 5:10. The apostle Paul taught in 1 Cor. 3:9-16 that all the works and deeds of life would be as one of six categories: wood, hay stubble, gold, silver, precious stones. All will be tried in judgment fire. Of course, wood, hay, and stubble are consumed. And, there are some who will be saved, yet so as by fire. They will be without the reward of life lived on earth. The judgment of a fellow brother in Christ as a moron is herewith underscored as wood, hay, stubble, and not the life that will be rewarded. That in itself is a catastrophe no believer should have. It is apostasy in the strictest sense, but a far cry from the idea of the impossible falling from grace..

FOR THOUGHT: How precise do you think Jesus will be when He reviews the works of all of His people at the Judgment Seat of Christ? Are you creating gold, silver, and precious stones by the way you follow His directions? Will you begin to do that today? List some of the things you may do to accumulate reward.

MODERN EVANGELISM IS EVANGELISM SKEWED

God is so wonderful! He has done everything necessary for sinful men to be eternally saved spiritually, and to achieve salvation of the mind-life (proper maturity in understanding and employing biblical instructions). His will is so plainly expressed in I Timothy 2:4, *"Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."*

Somewhere along the long line of history, evangelism has taken on a new, but man-made, reduced meaning. Still, the true meaning of the term must be understood from the biblical presentation of it in action, and there is no shortage of that. A few select instances are herewith cited. New Testament work is built upon repentance from sins in obedience to God, followed by receiving heaven's authorized baptism. This was begun by John the Baptist, and placed in His church by Jesus Himself. All the disciples of Jesus received it, including our Lord Himself. From that point forward one may note the baptism of Cornelius (Acts 10); the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8); Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9); the Philippian jailer (Acts 16); the group improperly baptized (Acts 19), et., etc. Deep water immersion of each professed believer was administered as the consistent biblical pattern for that time, and throughout the age. It is still God's approved method of evangelism.

However, what is now largely assigned to the term "evangelism" is simply leading one to profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. At that point, the person is dropped to join whatever may exist under the broad banner of "Christianity," whether such movement is scriptural or not or even if they do not practice baptism. This is the injection of man's preferences into the Word of God, and that is iniquity. It will not stand in the Day of Judgment. Some will be shocked to learn that they have been led astray, and others will be shocked that their "good" intentions were the source of leading others astray.

Folks, it should be known that "evangelism" is a Greek term that has been transliterated into English rather than translated. The translation of the term is "good news or good announcement." Contrary to what many want to believe, the good news or announcement is not simply that men can now be saved. That has been going on since Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden. Rather it is that lost men may continue to be saved, but now be added to the Lord's church, the executor of the kingdom of heaven, and achieve a high degree of spiritual maturity under the tutorial leadership of the Holy Spirit given to it. Such will enable those so exercised to rule and to reign with Christ in the upcoming millennial reign. To shortchange evangelism is to cheat men out of this grand opportunity.

FOR THOUGHT: What do you understand by the terms "Evangelism" and "Soul-winning"? Is it a matter of concern that your definitions match those of the Bible? It is possible to find instances in the Bible where people were encouraged to trust the Lord with proper baptism ignored?

MOMMA'S KNIFE

"For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Hebrews 4:12

Someone, no, a lot of folks have said, "you know you are getting old when you look backward in life more than you look forward." I am guilty! But wait a minute! That does not mean that I have one foot in the grave and the other on a banana peel. Still, it is sweet to reminisce about little things that caresses the heart as a sweet piece of pie titillates the tongue and pleases the palette. Bear with me!

The year was 1959, and I was twenty years old. In the spring, I announced to my church, Cavanaugh Missionary Baptist Church in Fort Smith, Arkansas that God had called me to preach the gospel. That stirred a lot of emotions in several people: some very happy, and a few disappointed. But, these asides will now be forgone.

As spring turned to summer, preparations were made to enter Missionary Baptist Seminary in Little Rock, Ark. Although I had been away from home in military camps and basic training, there had always been someone responsible for my living quarters, food, clothing, etc. Moving to Little Rock from Fort Smith would entail a whole different set of circumstances, including knowing no one there. As August came, it was time to make the move. It would allow some time to find a place to live, and an all-important job to pay those expenses.

To help make things easier, mom put together some necessities for bachelor living: cooking and dining utensils, some non-perishable food items, recipes, and the like. Among those things was her best butcher knife. I had little appreciation at the time how valuable that knife would become. Now, some 60 years later, that knife is still the most used utensil in the kitchen. It is the best peeling knife, melon splitter, bread cutter, butter spreader, etc. It is made of high grade steel so thin one can almost double the blade backwards, but it will peel a potato before quick can get ready. I am protective of that knife. The handle is well-worn hardwood. I will not let it go into the automatic dishwasher. It is always on the kitchen counter, ready to be used for so many different purposes.

Mom and dad are both gone now. Over 30 years have come and gone since they took their flight heavenward, but there is nothing in our household: pictures, dishes, or other things that hold the same sentimental value as momma's knife. It evokes a picture of her in happy days long ago in her kitchen preparing meals for her family whom she often described as appetites with skin pulled over them.

Sometimes it seems strange what attachment is placed on things others may not notice at all, but momma's knife reminds me of another knife that God gave to me. It is sharper than any two-edged sword, and . . . is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Thank you, Lord, for that knife!

FOR THOUGHT: Have you been surprised at what sentimental attachments you place on the most unlikely items reminding you of precious people? What do you have, and prize, that reminds you most of God and His grace? Do you protect that?

NATIONAL SLIDE: HOW FAR, HOW FAST?

"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;" Romans 1:28.

A television news commentator was recently heard to say, "How did we come to this? How did we slide so far so fast?" It is a question posed by a lot of folks across the country who find their heads reeling with the magnitude and speed of national decline, moral indecency, and widespread corruption. Although multi-faceted, the answer is not complicated. Think with me!

Fast track back over 90 years. Think of the infamous Scopes Trial involving William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow as adversaries over the teaching of Darwinian evolution in public schools. It launched a continuous slide until a near reversal prevailed: it is now unlawful in most schools to teach creationism instead of the evolution of species.

Next came monetary inflation associated with the industrial revolution, and its effect on churches. It was exciting that churches could now have access to funds for building and expansion. So they built. They expanded. They programmed. Soon, it was apparent that anything controversial must be avoided as it would cause a reduction of members, and their offerings so necessary to meet the large debt obligations of material expansion. Doctrine and culture clashes were avoided while children became latchkey kids as both parents worked to keep pace with society's ever escalating material offerings. Meanwhile, those children were being systematically taught from kindergarten through college that they were a product of evolution. The logical result of that is that if so, they are not accountable to any higher power such as the "Christian Crutch": God! Christianity was relegated to being a segment of culture, formalistic, ritualistic, non-spiritual, and marginalized by masses of its once proponents. From this came Roe vs Wade and the annual slaughter of millions of innocents. The prime motivation of life became, nothing must stand in the way of self gratification. Enter the "normalization" of homosexuality and the labeling of God's Word as hate speech, and you have arrived at how far, how fast the slide. So, a new generation arose that knew not God! Though similar to ancient Israel in the days of its judges, it is certainly a commentary, description, explanation in part of the slide of Christianity in America. Finally, those who reject God, God rejects, and He turns them over to a reprobate mind to do those things that are evil; whose judgment flies toward them swiftly and certain.

FOR THOUGHT: Have you studied history enough to know that history repeats itself? Do you agree that it repeats itself more quickly on those who forget the past? How much have government schools with tenured instructors been responsible for this slide? How much have parents contributed to the slide by abandoning their children in favor of the workplace?

NEGATIVE POSITIVE OR POSITIVE NEGATIVE?

In the blessed state before time began as we know it, there was only the single dimension of life. I speak of the holy will of God permeating in totality all that then was. In an interesting study of Bible Numerics, it is learned that the number "2" is the number of division, of another viewpoint, of something in addition to the will of God; hence, of sin and evil. This began inexplicably in Lucifer. With the inception of sin, comes the dimension of opposites. Nothing can be thought of in the finite mind that does not have an opposite. Hence, the burden of this article. Think with me about this.

Christianity is essentially a positive way of life. But to say it is positive admits that there are negatives, by which positives are recognized. But it is most important that the viewpoint of one's life in Christ be framed correctly. That is: do not try to live the Christian life in the negative, but in the positive. Let me explain. When one attends to the positive life in Christ, his attention and energies will be there. And what a joy it is to bask in the endless blessings they afford. The problem with some folks is that they approach life with attention to the negatives. It is what they do not do that is important to them: they do not curse today, they do not lie, today; they do not steal or slander, today. With all their attention focused on the negatives, they can be sure that they will fall into one or more of them sooner or later, then what? These are the very things that many attend who believe in apostasy; hence, they must be saved all over again due to their failure. Such is not reality at all in the grace of God. It is rather that life should be lived in the Positive/negative mode.

There is so much to learn from the Holy Word that brings true joy to the soul. Moreover, I have observed and learned that the temptation to do evil has no place when one is immersed in thought or prayer about holy things. One will never be tempted to tell a friend a smutty joke if he is seeking the salvation of that friend. Here, then is the essence of proper priority. In the words of Paul to the church at Colossi, "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.*" 3:16-17.

When this is done, the negatives will be there, but have no place in the Christian life. It should never be Negative/positive, but always Positive/negative. But what to do if the negatives surface as they surely will? John tells us in his first epistle at 1:9, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

FOR THOUGHT: Have entertained the idea that life in eternity will be only positive? Could the elimination of negatives be a part of what is conveyed when it is said of that environment, "The former things are passed away"? How glorious do you think that will be?

NEW TESTAMENT IS CHURCH COVENANT

“I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:6-9.

The New Testament of our Lord and Savior, Christ Jesus is the covenant in detail that governs His churches. While it is seldom referred to as the church covenant, that is exactly what it is.

However, it is not unusual to find a large, framed document hanging on the sanctuary wall of many Baptist churches that is entitled, “The Church Covenant.” It is an encapsulation of a number of principles found in the New Testament together with practices and lifestyles generally agreed to by sincere church members. This document is not given the respect or obedience shown to the New Testament, and many church members may not know much about it anymore, but it tells an interesting story.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there arose a significant Temperance Movement before prohibition days. The Women’s Temperance Movement played a large role in anti-alcohol demonstrations. A noted leader of that was a woman named Carrie Amelia Moore Nation. She filled the national spotlight with her extreme, and radical ploys to close taverns.

Of course, Carrie Nation had nothing at all to do with the formulation of the document still widely recognized as the church covenant, but it was formulated in the environment of those times. Reading the document, a dedicated church member will find little to nothing with which he disagrees, but it leaves one to wonder why it continues to exist. In those early days, copies of the Bible were not so plentiful, and meager incomes had, of necessity, to be spent on very basic necessities. So, one could reason that the document was an attempt to place important principles before the eyes of those who may not own a Bible. However, that argument is clearly weak.

The argument against it today is largely that people tend to accept as holy that which is put before them with consistency over the years. To some, the framed document is a holy document. But it is not!

The covenant that God has with His people is clearly the New Testament and the Psalms. This involves much more fundamentally important information for which account must be given than the framed document. I accept the New Testament as the church covenant!

FOR THOUGHT: Did you know that the terms “Testament” and “Covenant” are interchangeable, especially when applied to the Bible? Do you think most Baptist people live in accordance with the framed Church Covenant?

NEXT TO GODLINESS

There is an old saying often heard a generation or two ago: "Cleanliness is next to godliness!" If applied to one's spiritual life, there may be something to it, but most often it was understood to apply to the physical body. Maybe that was due to the weekly bathing most did due to a lack of running water, especially hot water. As the idea applies to the body, I never did believe the old saying was true. However, there is much to be said of it when one applies it to the spiritual life.

Sin is always represented as vile, filthy, reprehensible, etc. Even the goodness of natural man is that way in God's sight. Notice His estimation of man's righteousness in Isaiah 64:6, *"But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away."*

On the other hand, true righteousness is represented as cleanliness. It is here that the old saying finds its true meaning. As the Lord chastened His people through the prophet Isaiah, He admonished: *"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."* Isa. 1:16-17.

In New Testament times when Jesus was rebuffed because His disciples were eating without washing their hands, He taught quite plainly that it was not that which entered the body that defiles a man, but what came out of it. Matt. 15:11, 20.

It should also be noted that the apostle Paul explained to the church at Ephesus that His church was so loved by Jesus. He loved it enough that He gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. Eph. 5:25-26.

The apostle James doubled down on this great truth by stating, ". . . *cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.*" James 4:8. Those words were presented here as the essential action for one to be close to God. He introduced the idea by saying, *"Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you. . . "*

Obviously, it is essential for every person to repent of sin, and trust the Lord Jesus Christ as the only personal Savior, but perhaps the appeal is most often written to God's own people to encourage them to enter the strait gate and walk in the narrow way. How that is done is pointedly revealed by the ancient psalmist in Psalm 119:9, *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy Word."*

Truly, a clean body smells better than a dirty one, and it is often essential to good health. But cleanliness next to godliness must reference the very heart to be realized as true.

FOR THOUGHT: Did you notice that several different words are used to mean the same thing? "Wash," "Cleanse," "Purify" are all directed to make one's way (life) pleasing to God. Have these things been applied to your life? List some changes they have made.

NOT THE AGE OF AQUARIUS, BUT OF PHARMACY

“Pharmacy” is transliterated from the ancient Greek language (taken bodily from one language to another). There it appears as “pharmakeia.” It means the dispensing and use of drugs, but mainly in a bad sense. In both Old and New Testaments, this term, and its Hebrew equivalent “kashaph” are translated in English as “witchcraft(s) and sorcery.” It is a practice that plays a major role in the lives of men as the age comes to a close. This idea is not to be taken as an accusation of evil toward legitimate pharmacies whose purpose is to aid in the treatment of the ills and pains of men in their physical infirmities. But it denotes the ages-long abuse and misuse of drugs in what is called recreational, and mind altering abuse. Moreover, the Biblical terms “witchcraft” and “sorcery” have definite metaphorical denotations in their usage throughout history.

Sometimes a drug is a physical substance. Sometimes it is a strong line of falsehoods meant to alter the thinking from that which is ultimately true, especially the Word of God. In ancient times idolaters used both. They used physical drugs as they knew them, but the aim and purpose was to captivate, and alter the minds of men with forms of doctrine and ceremonies that originated in hell itself. Why did this happen, and why does it continue to happen? It is as old as good and evil, God and Satan. It is Satan’s design and purpose to destroy the very images of Almighty God (people) as much as possible. He is the destroyer, and that must not be forgotten.

The apostle Paul named “Pharmakeia,” translated “witchcraft,” as a work of the sinful flesh in Galatians 5:20. Additionally, as the false religious systems of the world, termed metaphorically as Babylon, are destroyed, their just and righteous charge among several other things is the practice and dissemination of (pharmakeia). sorceries, Revelation 18:23. It is by these things that false religion has been drunk with the blood of God’s people from the death of righteous Abel, to the prophets, and onward to New Testament times. Presently, the explosion of “Pharmakeia” in literal and metaphorical senses is bringing about the destruction of myriad lives, this nation, and the world at large. It is imperative then to the wellbeing of every person to have the firsthand, knowledgeable standing place. If it is deemed wise to avoid the literal “Pharmakeia,” it is many times more wise to avoid the metaphorical “Pharmakeia.” It is the inerrant, infallible Word of God, and not the word of religious men or the alignment of stars that offers the only acceptable alternative. How dare anyone to let it collect dust in their homes and lives.

Let those with ears to hear, hear the admonition to abandon the drunken course of this world and its influence on eternal verities. God offers to all sobriety, but those in “pharmakeia” will meet the sure judgment already set forth in clear terms of Holy Writ!

FOR THOUGHT: So called “recreational drugs” are taken for their mind altering qualities, but do you think having one’s mind altered is a good thing? What happens when the alteration becomes permanent? Which do you think inflicts more damage: physical drugs or false religion altering thinking away from the Bible to please humanistic mindsets?

OH, I BELIEVE THERE ARE ANGELS AMONG US

A few years ago, a popular religious song carried the line of this title in its lyrics. The words went on to say..... sent down to us from somewhere up above. To be sure, there are angels among us. I do not refer to saintly mothers, darling children, or that those become angels upon physical death. Rather reference is made to the myriad of intellectual, spiritual creatures made by the Lord for specific purposes of ministry to Him. These remain in the invisible dimension except when commissioned to visit the visible world on special errand from God. Definitely, there is much going on in the unseen world which requires no sleep.

Just take a quick survey of angelic appearances in the past. The angel of the Lord appeared to Abraham, Hagar, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and to the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Daniel, and to Mary and Joseph, as well as to the shepherds to announce Jesus' birth. The angel Gabriel was dispatched from the Lord with special enlightening messages for Daniel, but an evil angel hindered his mission for several days. It was then that the Angel Michael was sent to overcome the evil angel, and allow Gabriel to fulfill his mission.

When the city of Dothan was apparently doomed by the advancing hosts of Syria, a huge amount of angels with chariots of fire appeared encircling the entire area. The Syrians were smitten with blindness, and sent home humiliated. 2 Kings 6. Then, of course, in New Testament times an angel brought Peter out of prison when he was secured both by chains and guards. An angel told Paul that he did not have to fear drowning in the shipwreck at sea. Moreover, Paul was told that everyone on the ship would also be spared, and that he would indeed stand before Caesar. It is interesting to note that Holy Writ also declares that the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him and delivers them. Psalm 34:7. Yes, indeed there are angels, very real angels among us.

But perhaps the most notable activity of angels will occur just before the end of the age. During the great tribulation, they will sound trumpets, pour out vials of wrath, preach the everlasting gospel, etc. Much is going on behind the veil that blocks human sight. Some of these things may be seen by humans, but only with the eyes of faith as one relies heavily on the ingested Word of God. How truly marvelous it is that there are angels among us!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you realize that guardian angels are among us, and you are never really alone? Does that give you pause about thoughts, actions, and places where you go? What are angels observing about you?

OMG: A COMMANDMENT BREAKER??

A sage once said, "People may get so heavenly minded that they are of little earthly good!" This is especially true when the intellect is disengaged in favor of whatever may be generally accepted as right. This then becomes the devil's playground. Please think for a moment with me!

I have witnessed folks being verbally chastised for using the letters "OMG," understanding it means "Oh my God!" as breaking one of the ten commandments (although the letters could stand for several other expressions). This arises from an unwillingness on the part of the chastiser to bother himself to learn what is being said in the commandments.

The commandment in question is found in Exodus 20:7, *"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in Vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."* The general ASSUMPTION here is that "vain" means frivolously, flippantly, and with little to no cause. It is not the purpose of this article to approve bad language, but to emphasize that there is a distinct difference between bad language and breaking that commandment, and the truth is surprising.

There are some half dozen or so terms in the ancient Hebrew language that are translated "vain." This English term is largely, and correctly, understood to mean "for nothing, frivolous," but the Hebrew word in the commandment, "Shav," is mostly used to indicate "in connection with a falsehood." God hates a lie. The devil is the father of it. Other words are used to better indicate the English idea of "vanity." A false witness is abhorred, and rightly so since the gateway and road of life is guarded by and dependent upon truth.

So, bad language is understood for what it is. Cursing is understood for what it is, but false information believed is deceitful, and it carries the power of condemnation. Who is it then who breaks this commandment? Not the cursing sailor or the Christian who chooses questionable expressions, but it is the false witness including a supposed minister who speaks biblically condemned doctrine as being correct in the name of God. Though it may be tangential thinking, it may be far better to hear a sailor cursing than an Osteen type minister who lies about God's Word with a smile on his face reminiscent of a wave on a slop bucket. In case the reader feels the writer has himself gone off the deep end, it would be well to pause and read again 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. What Holy Writ contains is more than interesting!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you agree that a falsehood is in fact a lie? Does bad language which should be disdained, necessarily constitute a lie? Does a false plan of salvation spoken from a pulpit constitute a lie? Which then breaks the commandment? Does this help you to see the Bible in a more serious way?

ON TOP OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Phil. 4:13.

A syndrome is defined as a set of symptoms or a condition characterized by a set of symptoms working together by which it is identified, as the "not in my backyard" syndrome.

In today's world, it is easy to find a negative syndrome dominating the lives of God's people. It is the sense of overload, of burden that limits or negates altogether their pressing forward in the things that really count in life: that which is of God, and beneficial to self and to others. What I mean is this: When asked how one is doing or when asking for someone to actually do something, one is likely to hear: "I am doing all right under the circumstances," or "I would love to, but cannot under the circumstances."

Now why is it that most folks are always "under the circumstances?" Is this just an excuse, or do people really feel loaded down, depressed, unable to do what they should with any degree of joy? Doubtless, this is a condition that actually exists in the lives of some folks at times, but then they become comfortable in it, and it becomes a syndrome by which they are recognized.

The good news is that there is another, completely different syndrome that can characterize life. It is the "I can" syndrome. Folks in leadership capacity often look for someone to take responsibility for a task. They find without exception that if they really want to get something done, they call on someone who is really busy. In him/her they will find one who has learned to manage time and abilities; one who is characterized by the "I can" syndrome. Such persons live in the joy of accomplishment: on TOP of the circumstances instead of under them. This is the syndrome that characterized the apostle Paul. He, more than others, could have set forth reasons why he had enough burdens, and experienced too many heartaches, but his was the joy of involvement, of accomplishment. He is a great example of what we all can be in Christ. We should all be busy doing what we can do for the cause of Christ, not under, but on top of the circumstances. That is altogether possible in Christ!

FOR THOUGHT: How many times have you procrastinated because you were under the circumstances? Do you find joy in the "I can" syndrome? Do you see these attitudes as habitual motivators in life that become a syndrome by which you are identified?

ONE YEAR OF EXPERIENCE TEN TIMES

An interesting comment was made in my presence many years ago. My friend who was vice-president of a major bank at the time, related in the course of conversation that a teller requested a raise in pay. When asked to justify the action, the teller replied that she deserved it because she now has ten years of experience. Whereupon the vice-president retorted that he could understand that from her viewpoint, but that she must understand that from the bank's viewpoint she did not have ten years of experience, rather she had one year of experience ten times.

Pondering that conversation for many years, it has become painfully clear that this is the case of way too many members of the Lord's churches everywhere. Some are quite proud of their longevity of membership, and perhaps faithfulness in attendance. While these things are to be appreciated, it is not a point of honor and glory for church members to have less than one year's experience forty times or more. It is easy for one to get the distinct impression that a lot of church folk see the Christian life as static. They have been saved, baptized, and admitted to the membership of a New Testament Church. With those things in place, they feel that they are to mark time until Jesus comes. But, those things are NOT to be catapults into a static position. Rather, they are foundational to massive growth in knowledge and grace in what the spiritual work of the church is about; to help prepare saints to rule and reign with Christ in the age that is about to happen.

So, in listening to others, and in private experience, learn to pray! Discover the contents of the blessed Book which is the only thing in this world that will survive, and be in primary play in eternity. Peter's admonition to grow in grace and knowledge, 2 Peter 3:18, is so important to every believer. The truly important thing in life is what one believes, and one cannot believe what he does not know. Therefore all of God's people should be in hot pursuit of spiritual knowledge, intensifying faith, and enjoying the peace and joy of understanding and wisdom that brings. The personal question: "what have I learned in the last few years?" is important. 2 Peter 3:18 admonishes us all: "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ..."

How sad it will be for some who will fail to impress the Lord with their long, static position to hear Him say, "My child you have one year of experience forty times." I have no bragging room or rights on this subject, nor are they sought, but I am still learning.

FOR THOUGHT: After reading this article, how many years of experience do you think you have? Do you think you are ready to rule and reign with Jesus based on your present knowledge of the Bible? If not, what is the plan to change that?

PASSING YOUR ISAAC TEST

"And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of." Genesis 22:1-2.

One of the best loved bible stories is that of the offering of Isaac by his father Abraham. It is recorded in Genesis 22. It is a story of profound faith on display for the benefit of all succeeding generations. Truly, there is still much to be said about that monumental event, but comments are here confined to the test of Abraham's faith in God, and its extrapolation to modern day saints.

Let it be noted that the arena of fellowship with God prepared the patriarch for it, and he was not totally blindsided by divine command. In fact, that preparation underscores the nature and the value of daily awareness of, and personal implementation of, the Holy Word, which is the essence of faith.

God had promised the lineage of Abraham's seed would be perpetuated through Isaac. Thus, Abraham did not just acquiesce to that, but believed it with all his heart. If Isaac were offered up to God, then God had already obligated Himself to raise him from the dead, restore him to his father, and give him children. Had the patriarch been lackadaisical in his relationship with God, and his awareness of His Word, he could not have passed this profound test.

It is sad that in these last days when God's people have access to the completed Word of God, a great many know less of it than Abraham did. He never owned a copy. Is it any wonder then that when adversity or some hard thing comes that so many are stopped in their tracks?

Every true Christian has an Isaac test. It is not like that of Abraham, but it is a test of faith just the same. Those who are familiar with the Word, and in daily communication with the Lord pass their Isaac test as did the ancient patriarch. Those who do not read the Bible, and profess to be born-again church members, but miss church meetings more than they attend, find themselves perplexed, amazed, and unable to cope with those tests that come ... andthey will come! Please know that there is great reward and tremendous joy to those who pass their Isaac test, just as there was to our father, Abraham.

Happy indeed are those who welcome their Isaac test, because they know God's promises, and are unshakable in "thus saith the Lord."

FOR THOUGHT: Can you identify at least one Isaac test in your life that you passed because you were without options, and you had to depend on God and the promises of His Word? How do you feel about that now?

PEOPLE'S POLITICAL PLATITUDES

Every four years, the country suffers the deluge of political platitudes in sufficient quantity to ensure weariness. It is expected, and among those who think, most of the grand promises promoted are taken with a grain of salt. However, in this context, it is troubling to note an apparent lack of understanding about the history of the nation and its relationship to God. It is often heard that "America needs to return to God!" or some similar statement of the same import, except in recent political rallies where He has been booed. Really?

In the early days of this country, Baptists were imprisoned for nothing more than preaching Bible truth. They were taxed against their will to build church houses of Protestant denominations. To be sure, the Lord's churches have enjoyed a tremendous degree of freedom here, and flourished therein, but most of those freedoms came about because God blessed the consistent, pressing efforts of His people. Moreover, this also was not without undesirable repercussions. Some were jailed simply for being adamant about their beliefs of God and freedom.

So, in the general context of religious life, America is noted as a "Christian" nation. However, the persistent rejection of foundational ethics of Judeo-Christian origin, moral, ethical, and religious standards have been more in a nose dive than on a slippery slope. The bottom line is that as a nation, America has never been in step with God. The platitude of "America needs to return to God" would better be stated, "America needs to turn to God."

It is still true that Satan is the god of this world. His power is such that he offered the kingdoms of this world to Jesus if only He would worship him. Was the offer legit? Surely it was, and had to be in order for it to be a temptation.

But it is demonstrably true that God had, and has, much to do with this country; much more than the country has to do with Him! It is lamentable, but Bible students have peace in this world of turmoil because they have read the last chapter of the Holy Book. The sinking of nations into the cesspools of sin is a precursor to the return of Jesus. Meanwhile, how nice it would be if leaders would learn that *"righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people!"* Prov. 14:34

FOR THOUGHT: Do you and your family, or your friends, ever talk about God and politics? Some say those two topics are so controversial that they are off limits. Why? Are they not the two great forces that affect life here and hereafter? What do you enjoy talking about?

PERCEPTION AND REALITY: A REASON TO FEAR (MY SOAPBOX)

"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people." Proverbs 14:34.

There is an old saying that perception perpetrated long enough becomes reality. That principle often dominates in the world of ideas. One tuned in to news of current events, even occasionally, will hear much in the political arena of ideas about our country being a democracy. That simply is not true. The United States of America as a political system is a Constitutional Republic! There is a difference. It is an important difference.

The diffusion of power in a nation has always been a problem to freedom loving people. The world has had more than its fill of monarchies, oligarchies, democracies, communism, socialism, fascism, and dozens of aberrations of those forms. The wise founders of this nation wrestled in the world of ideas about how to fashion a government of, by, and for the people to insure the maximum freedom to individuals, and limited, but sufficient powers to government. Their wrestling and their wisdom paid off big time! In outspoken disdain for democracies with their consistent failures, and obvious disdain for monarchies and oligarchies, a new and far better form of government was hammered out that is under siege today more than most people realize.

Listen, listen. It is not "Constitutional Republic" that rolls off the tongue of would be rulers. Rather it is "Democracy" that one hears. Moreover that is repeated often and purposefully. When the thought pattern of democracy is ingrained enough, the tenants of a republic are set aside. When the government becomes the expression of the majority vote of individuals, all the safeguards of the constitution are negated. It is a case of perception becoming reality.

Resistance to this infringement on the best form of government the world has ever known depends upon education and testimony. It really is incumbent upon every citizen to know what kind of government constitutes his homeland. It really is incumbent upon every citizen to discern error from truth and speak out about it. This nation is a nation of states all of whom have rights, and all of whom ratified the United States Constitution, under which unparalleled freedom is enjoyed. It is the Electoral College that affords all of the states undeniable rights in selecting the executive branch leader of the nation. It is the Constitution of the United States of America that guarantees freedom of speech, religion, the right to bear arms, etc. Let it be proudly announced that we pledge allegiance not to a democracy, but to the republic for which the flag stands. May it ever remain within the crafted confines of freedom until the absolute best ever form of government is initiated by the King of kings.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you appreciate the wisdom of our founding fathers who gave us a republic, "If we can keep it?" Do you agree with the statement: "For evil to reign, all that is required of good men is that they do nothing!"? Do you understand the safeguards of freedom the constitutional republic form of government affords every individual?

PERFECT: A BIBLE “BE”

The reference to Bible “BE” almost always calls to mind the beatitudes of the beloved Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5-7. However, there are other important usages of the topic. One such usage is “Be Perfect!” Think with me about it.

Jesus said, *“Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”* Matt. 5:48. Some folks explain this as the ideal, but unachievable. Such reasoning puts Jesus into the context of playing mind games with His hearers. Unthinkable! What then is one to make of this exhortation? Often heard at home, school, and church is: “nobody is perfect.” That is evidence that the term is commonly understood as “being without fault.” However, that is not the usual meaning attached to it in the Bible. Consider some scripture contexts.

Let the reader think “complete” when “perfect (ion)” is read. The mystery then gives way to understanding. It is the will of God that His people achieve a perfect (complete) understanding of the tenants of His Holy Word together with the moral compass it includes. Hear the writer of Hebrews in 6:1, *“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto(completion); not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,”* To this, James exhorts, *“But let patience have her perfect (complete) work, that ye may be perfect(complete) and entire, wanting nothing.”* James 1:4. Paul told the Philippians in 3:15, *“Let us therefore, as many as be, (complete) be thus minded:. . .”* It should be noted that Timothy was told in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, (completely, or) thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

God knows better than any mortal that sinlessness in human flesh is impossible to all the offspring of Adam. He also knows that spiritual understanding and obedience to that understanding is altogether attainable with the spiritual help of the Lord. Consider how this applies to the faith once delivered to the saints. Aside from mental acquiescence to those tenants, what do you personally know about the hereditary depravity of the total man; salvation by grace alone; eternal security of the believer; the proper method, subject, and administrator of baptism; the nature of the New Testament church? Are these things being left up to the pastor? If so, such parishioners would make good Catholics. It is not the pastor only who is to go on to perfection, but every true disciple. These things will be underscored in unimaginable ways at the return of our Savior and King.

FOR THOUGHT: Does the Bible meaning of “Complete” associated with the term “Perfect” change the way you understand many verses of scripture? What do you understand the call to perfection in the Bible to mean to you personally? Will you now evaluate your completeness in ability to analyze the Bible? To enumerate core doctrines of the New Testament?

PICTURING THE WAY IT WAS

The Christmas stars seem close tonight,
And I imagine glory-light
That slowly crosses eastern sky,
While angels hover heaven-high,
Waiting with soft wings unfurled to tell the world
Of a baby in a manger bed;
A halo circling His head —
Promise wrapped in swaddling clothes,
The prophecy a mother knows.
Joseph's husky lullaby to arrest a possible baby—cry.

Shepherd's campfires burning low,
Dark hillsides suddenly aglow.
A rush of wings on midnight wind
As praising angel hosts descend
With news they've waited long to tell:
The Christ is born,
Emmanuel!

Amazed innkeeper on his knees,
Awestruck now that he believes,
And messengers, their tidings done
Fly home again to the Holy One.
Small lambs warn the infant's feet,
Newborn earth child with God's heartbeat.

Faye Boyette Wise

FOR THOUGHT: The able pen of Faye Boyette Wise has blessed minds, hearts, books for many years. She has been a special Christian friend and blessing to the author for nearly fifty years. Do you have such a valued friend? Are you willing to be one to someone else?

PITCH A SHOE OR PITCHING FOR SHOES

The modern phrase: "Pitch a shoe" is an expression of frustration, anger, and/or rejection. Though used in modern times, especially in the South and Midwest for the expressed purposes mentioned above, it is also an ancient action that took place literally under certain conditions. Let's think for a minute!

In securing the role of Kinsman Redeemer to Naomi and Ruth, Boaz called a witnessing council at the gate of the city to witness a cunningly engineered proposition to a closer kinsman that he might reject the option, leaving Boaz free to purchase the fields of Naomi, and the right to Ruth as his wife. The one closer than he verified his quit claim to the option by loosing or pitching his shoe! See Ruth 4.

In Deut. 25, the specifics of the above law are spelled out. Here it involves the loathing spittle of a widow as well as the loosed or pitched shoe, which forever designated the house of the rejecter as the house of a loosed or pitched shoe.

Aside from the ideas of modern anger and ancient rejection, there is another great teaching moment in the title's phraseology. Once the manufacturer of shoes hired a salesman to market his shoes to the people in Africa. The salesman booked passage, and upon arrival found everyone barefooted. He told his boss that there was no need to send him shoes because the people here did not use them. In frustration (pitching a shoe) his boss sent another salesman to the same place. Upon arrival he too found everyone barefooted. He immediately wired his boss to send a boatload of shoes because no one there had them. What a difference in attitude and perspective! His was not to "Pitch a shoe," but to "Pitch for shoes!"

Too often, folks are reminded of a ministerial lament that people are not church-minded or even mindful of the Lord, and pine away in discouragement. Perhaps we would all do well to take on the perspective and attitude of the second salesman. If folks have no or little regard for the Lord and His work; if they do not profess to be saved, then perhaps a fertile, wide open field of great harvest is found. But they must be presented with the gospel. The Holy Spirit will do the rest.

In the story, if the people in Africa all had shoes, but worn-out ones, perhaps the first salesman would have rejoiced. But had that been so, it would mean that others would have already cornered that market, and would not be content with a one-time sale. Maybe, just maybe there is a parallel here to be thoughtfully considered: Not pitching a shoe, but making a pitch for shoes. That is not seeking to build on the work of others, but winning the lost, and teaching them the glorious gospel

FOR THOUGHT: Do you ever wonder why some Christians seek excuses to not serve the Lord while some others are eager and enthusiastic about doing so? What do you think makes them different? How do you feel about engaging in spiritual activities? Are they a burdensome necessity? Are they a joyful opportunity? Why is that?

PLANET EARTH: MY MOTHER!

There is a natal bond between planet Earth and mankind. From the initial days in Eden it speaks of his prime directive or purpose. Think with me!

Adam (mankind) was the name of the first human. Add the feminine ending (ah) to that word in Hebrew and one has "Adamah" which is translated as "Dust, soil, dirt," the substance of the planet. So, Earth is the mother of mankind, and God is the Creator/Father. Adam was made to be a man from the same elements as the soil, and God breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives: (yes, lives, plural) physical, mental and spiritual. Thus Adam was made the lord of the life sustaining planet. Inquiring minds want to know why.

Previously, the earth was under the care of Lucifer and the myriad of angels under his command. Lucifer coveted the position of the Son, originating opposition to the Will of God; hence, sin! It is believed that Lucifer is responsible for wrecking to the point of utter chaos what was a perfect, life-sustaining planet. Gen.1:2.

Logic would indicate that a controversy over ownership of the planet ensued between God as Creator, and Lucifer claiming it was given to him. There being no other super powers to settle the argument, the planet would thus speak for itself. Of course, being without a brain, or mouth, that seemed impossible, but here is where the import of the bond becomes underscored. God caused the planet to give birth as it were to one like itself, but who could reason, speak and make decisions. That would put Adam into the position of being a walking, talking dirtball, which seems a little humiliating. Actually, it is an extremely exalted position. He would speak for the planet.

So man must be subjected to the influences of God and Lucifer. Eve being deceived and Adam choosing her over the word of his Creator brought sin to the species, and a yielding up of the lordship of the planet to the fallen archangel.

But the story does not end there. The Creator chose to become one of His created beings and succeed where Adam failed. Since it was a decision of commitment that brought sin, it is likewise a decision of commitment that brings life and righteousness. It is also the purpose of the Creator to bring man to a high level of spiritual maturity that will enable him to do in the millennial reign of Christ what he should have been doing from the beginning. He will rule the earth in righteousness to the eternal glory of Jesus, and to the astonishment of His unfathomable grace. Paul says in Romans 8 that the creation groans in travail, awaiting the glorious liberty of the sons of God (its offspring) in which it also will be finally freed from the power of bondage. There is a good reason earth is called "Mother Earth."

FOR THOUGHT: Do you think many people understand the natal relationship of mankind with the earth, and the responsibility they have to live and speak righteously for it? Can you envision creation groaning in travail, awaiting the liberation of the sons of God? Can you imagine the molecules in multiplied trillions rejoicing in liberty when their offspring is liberated? Are you prepared for this soon coming day?

PLANNED UN-PARENTHOOD

*"These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and **hands that shed innocent blood**, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."* Proverbs 6:17-19.

Much has come to light in recent times that most every thinking person has known all along. It is sickening details of the business of Planned Parenthood which more properly should be called "Planned Un-parenthood." As the grisly details are forced upon the general public via various media, those who value life are made sick to their stomach. But what did folks think was going on inside abortion clinics anyway, a picnic! Think about it!

To abort a human life growing in the womb is to forcibly stop the progress of that life, in other words, to kill him/her. That is accomplished in the most brutal fashion, and it is being done by the thousands each year in this country. Now it has escalated to the business of selling the body parts for stem cell value to the highest bidder. How could the children of the greatest generation of Americans plunge into the cesspool of the sorriest generation of selfish murderers? It has to do with abandonment of Judeo-Christian morals in preference for the ROOT of all evil. It is a stark reminder that Satan is still the god of this present, evil world.

The sinking of America into the quicksand of sin is part of a master plan that is far from simple. Some of its multiple facets may be easily identified by thinking people of faith. Following WWII, the industrial age hit big time. The offering was material progress for all. The base selfishness of the flesh wants all the luxury available, and it is willing to sell its soul to have it. The LOVE of materialism, equated to money, quickly took ascendancy over spiritual values. Soon, it took both parents working outside the home to fulfill desires. Children which would have been better off left to themselves were abandoned to the anti-god forces of the world that taught them evolution, mocked spiritual things, and instilled in them via media that the really smart persons spent life in pursuit of material fulfillment. Moreover, the strongest God-given urge to mankind, that of reproduction was not subjugated to Christian morals, but to "If it feels good, do it! It can't be wrong if it feels so right!" But the initiation of innocent, precious life became a major block to the pursuit of material well-being and sensual gratification, and it had to be eliminated even if it meant killing him/her. So the powers that be sought ways to ease the conscience of those so selfishly willing to do anything to not take responsibility for their own immorality. They changed the whole concept from murder to a "right" to control one's own body. They called it simply clinical abortion. Tax dollars began to pour into the slaughter clinics via the rulings of the court system and evil lobbying efforts on a congress of base men, bent on protecting their own material gain and positions of power. It was not hard to do, but it is not over, yet.

So what about the ultimate end of this whole sordid affair? Millions of eternal lives are with Jesus whose parent (s) preferred murder to allowing them enjoyment in the banquet of life. Their dastardly action did not un-parent them, rather it made them the parent of a dead child whom they will meet in judgment when they stand before the Judge of all men. What then!?

FOR THOUGHT: "Selah!" (Just stop and think about this)!

PLEASE DON'T SHOOT ME!

As a child during WWII, living on the backside of Fort Chaffee, armored vehicles, tanks, convoy vehicles, bivouacking soldiers, guns, ammunition, and gunfire were all too familiar. So it happened. In the very first few days of school I was all decked out in my favorite, green, homemade overalls when, unknown to me, a photographer set up in a classroom to take individual pictures. This would be my first. However they used unfortunate terminology. They said, "We are going to shoot you!" Oh, I cried and tried to get away. The big, old camera was a giant, long box sitting on a tripod with a huge black cloth hiding the cameraman. The only thing I had ever seen resembling that was a machine gun. It took the photographer and two teachers to convince me I was not going to get shot, and to restore to me some semblance of order. Even then they had to demonstrate. It was a fearful time for many of us.

Even so, many unlearned Christians live in fear as well. They fear that something bad is going to happen to them when mention is made of the judgment as in Hebrews 9:27. But for God's people, the day of judgment is not one to recoil from, but one to look forward to, and to rejoice over. If some of God's people continue to live fearfully, even so carefully that they do not do many wrong things, they may still know the sorrow of losing reward having neglected so many right things; consequently, be saved so as by fire, I Cor. 3:9-15. But for those who press forward in life in accord with God's marvelous Word, the judgment seat of Christ will be a time of unimaginable reward and of great goodness.

If I had not been persuaded that the big box sitting on a tripod was a good thing, I would not have my first grade picture, which, by the way, has provided more than its share of chuckles as it brings all those memories into focus. I remain glad that what appeared to be bad for me was really good for me! Say, does that make Romans 8:28 come to mind? *"For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God: to them who are the called according to His purpose."*

FOR THOUGHT: Do you know that the Bible tells us that the goodness of God leads us to repentance? Repentance (turning away) from sin is acknowledging sin and evil in life. Do you see why some are reluctant to yield to this activity? Do you understand what Satan means to be your ultimate destruction, God convicts one of, and brings the repentant to goodness and life? Have you faced what is wrong in your life and repented of it?

PLEASE TELL ME #2

Easter Sunday, has come and gone, but it evoked questions in the minds of some who would like more information. This is an attempt to provide such for further thought.

- Q. Exactly what day of the week was Jesus crucified, and how can one know for sure? Exactly when was the veil of the Temple torn into two pieces, and just what is that supposed to mean?
- Q. Exactly when did the earthquake occur in connection with the crucifixion of Jesus? Exactly when did the great number of saints arise from the graves to be seen in Jerusalem?
- Q. Exactly why did Jesus forbid Mary to touch Him near the garden tomb, yet invited the disciples to freely feel his body?

An address of the 2nd question finds uniform harmony in the gospels. This is not to imply that there is disunity, but often scriptures tell of an event happening without a clear context, and that requires diligent study. However, the scriptures declare that there was an earthquake while Jesus was on the cross, and at or immediately after his death, the veil of the Temple was rent from top to bottom. Matt. 27:51-53. The import of this is of immense value. Think about it with me.

The Temple veil separated the outer room (the Holy Place) from the innermost room (the Holy of Holies). Therein resided the Ark of the Covenant. No one was allowed to enter that room except the High Priest on the annual day called Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). He could enter only after ceremonial cleansing, and his purpose was to sprinkle the sacrificial animal blood on the top of the Ark, which place was known as the Mercy Seat. The Spirit of God would consume it from that place, and a temporary covering of the sins of Israel was portrayed until the one sacrifice of the Lamb of God occurred. Jesus is that Lamb! His sacrifice not only paid the sin debt (John 3:16), it bought the church (Acts 20:28), and opened the door freely to all to approach Him in repentance. His sacrifice is valid for all, and for all time (Heb. 7:28). There is now no other mediator between God and man, but the man Christ Jesus, 1 Tim. 2:5) Thus are we all encouraged to come boldly before the Throne of Grace with our petitions and supplications (Heb. 4:16). Friends, no entity in the universe can stand between you and God. Are you letting this grand privilege slip away?

FOR THOUGHT: Have you studied the Bible enough to appreciate that the Old Testament Tabernacle and later Temple were shadows of New Testament realities? Do you see that the occurrences related in Matthew 27: 51-53 are not just unusual events underscoring the magnitude of the crucifixion, but symbolic of unmistakable spiritual realities every disciple of Jesus should know? Make plans now to fill your knowledge gap on these things.

PLEASE TELL ME #3

Easter Sunday, has come and gone, but it evoked questions in the minds of some who would like more information. This is an attempt to provide such for further thought.

- Q. Exactly what day of the week was Jesus crucified, and how can one know for sure? Exactly when was the veil of the Temple torn into two pieces, and just what is that supposed to mean?
- Q. Exactly when did the earthquake occur in connection with the crucifixion of Jesus? Exactly when did the great number of saints arise from the graves to be seen in Jerusalem?
- Q. Exactly why did Jesus forbid Mary to touch Him near the garden tomb, yet invited the disciples to freely feel his body?

God did not choose to use an abundance of verbosity simply to fill up a certain number of pages in His book. This underscores the fact that 2 Timothy 2:15 is not just good advice, it is vital to understanding. One must study to show himself approved of God; a workman who does not need to be ashamed, but who can rightly divide the word of truth. Thus as an answer to question number three is undertaken, it, too, must be the product of study, and some serious thought, too. Think with me about it!

Reading some of the gospel accounts could leave one wondering if there were an earthquake. Matthew makes note of the earth quaking, while the other gospel writers do not. Then in sorting out the meaning of Matthew's account one will find that there actually were two earthquakes. The first occurred at the moment of, or immediately after, Jesus died on the cross. Matthew 27:54 speaks of those who were watching Jesus also observing that earthquake. It is believed that this is also the moment of the veil of the Temple being rent from top to bottom. But, there is more. Matthew 27:51 records another earthquake at the resurrection of Jesus. It is here that rocks were rent, and the bodies of many of those who slept arose and went into the city. The key phrase in Matthew 27 is that the resurrection of those saints occurred "after His resurrection." Jesus is the first fruit of those who arise from the dead. What a joy it is to see these things coalesced into symmetrical sense. Just here this writer is reminded of Prov. 25:2, *"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter."*

PLEASE TELL ME #4

Easter Sunday, has come and gone, but it evoked questions in the minds of some who would like more information. This is an attempt to provide such for further thought.

- Q. Exactly what day of the week was Jesus crucified, and how can one know for sure? Exactly when was the veil of the Temple torn into two pieces, and just what is that supposed to mean?
- Q. Exactly when did the earthquake occur in connection with the crucifixion of Jesus? Exactly when did the great number of saints arise from the graves to be seen in Jerusalem?
- Q. Exactly why did Jesus forbid Mary to touch Him near the garden tomb, yet invited the disciples to freely feel his body?

“And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.”

On this question number four, the “when” is much easier to answer than other aspects of it. Think with me about it for a minute.

Some have erred in interpretation of these verses in Matthew 27, thinking the resurrection of many saints occurred at the death of Jesus on the cross. The key phrase is “after his resurrection” in verse 53. Jesus went into Paradise upon His death and preached to the spirits of just men awaiting there. 1 Peter 3:18-20. When he arose, He led “captivity captive.” Eph. 4:8. This teaches us that Paradise was removed from the realm of Hades to the realm of the heavenlies where the departed spirits of the saved go now at physical death.

Intriguing is the statement that the bodies of saints arose, not all, but many. With what body did they come forth, and what might have the criteria been by which they were chosen out of the entire population of Paradise to do this, are two questions of intense interest. If readers anticipated an answer in these lines, all the writer can do is apologize for his inability to give one of firm and logical standing. However, one may be sure it happened just this way, and the resurrection of those saints who were seen by many in Jerusalem is later used as irrefutable proof of the resurrection, both of Jesus and of those who trust in Him: marvelous truth and hope for all which even the Sadducees could not deny on any pretext of scripture.

FOR THOUGHT: Why do you think Jesus allowed some saints who were retrieved from Paradise to appear to the citizens of Jerusalem? Could it be primarily an indisputable proof of resurrection? Isn't resurrection what Easter celebration is all about? Do you have personal hope of being resurrected following death?

PRAYING FOR RESULTS

"If I regard iniquity (religious activity and beliefs foreign to the scriptures) in my heart, the Lord will not hear me." Psalm 66:18.

Prayer is the most powerful act in the legitimate Christian's playbook! How often did Jesus pray, and teach us to pray. It is a prerequisite to being and doing well, even to living a peaceable life in a world filled with sin. Moreover, Jesus emphatically taught His church that they have not because they ask not. How oft, then should God's people send petitions before the very throne of grace. But there are problems that can hinder prayer, and there are unheard and unanswered prayers as a result of those things. Over time, these have a propensity to undermine Christian confidence in the effective power of prayer. Consequently, each one would do well to examine himself in light of the faith once delivered to the saints, and enter into a commitment of unreserved obedience to the teachings of Christ to expect that those prayers will be heard. Certainly, we also should have confidence in the spiritual standing of others whom we would ask to pray on our behalf. I would rather have one person in right standing with God praying for me than a thousand religious practitioners of heresy, or of morally good, but spiritually disobedient people..

Sometimes people are asked to be prayer partners on the basis of friendship, even though their religious practice is far afield from the New Testament teachings of obedience toward God. Then, when discernment of any answer is not forthcoming, the petitioner may wonder why all the silence. Is it possible such prayers were never heard? Consider some things the Holy Word says will effectively marginalize prayer activity. Isaiah said to Israel, *"Your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear."* Isa. 59:2. King David said, *"If I regard iniquity (religious activity and beliefs foreign to the scriptures) in my heart, the Lord will not hear me."* Psalm 66:18. God told Jeremiah, *"Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble."* Jer. 11:14. The Apostle, James said, *"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering, For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."* James 1:6-7.

Prayer is not a birthright, and God is not a faithful messenger boy awaiting unacceptable requests. That type of mindset results in disappointment, and often equates the whole idea to the power of positive thinking. However, the truth is that it is a glorious privilege to be able to send petitions to the very throne of God. *"The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much,"* James 5:16. But another sobering reality is that there are conditions which when present can stop those prayers at the ceiling, or at best in the attic. How much better is a penitent attitude and contrite heart when approaching the Throne of God.

FOR THOUGHT: Have you ever seriously considered that there are qualifications to an acceptable prayer? Even the prayer to be saved is predicated upon the understanding that one is lost, and God is turned to in repentance because there is no other Savior. What do you think David meant by his statement in Psalm 66:18? Do you think your prayers will be acceptable to God if you have a defiant attitude or a reservation to private sins? Why? Why not?

PROPERTIES OF OUR MOTHER TONGUE

Language is fascinating, and among its many properties is mood. Verbs especially, and entire sentence construction in English will reveal mood as indicative, (simple statement usually of fact); imperative mood, (command), or subjunctive mood (expression of doubt, or condition). Wise expositors of the Word pay attention to mood as well as other aspects of context.

Accordingly, sounding forth the Word is not as simple as reading a sentence, and attempting to explain it without some research. Failure at this point has led many “would be” expositors of the word into eisegesis rather than exegesis. The latter is a correct explanation or exposition of a text based on careful research, and objective analysis. The former is the opposite. It is reading INTO a passage the reader’s interpretation or what he wants it to mean based on unstudied, subjective, and largely non-analytical conclusions. Obviously, this is the fodder hurled forth from many pulpits on a regular basis, but it is far afield of the command of exegetical methodology embodied in 2 Timothy 2:15.

A couple of cases in point, of so many examples that could be cited, are the common misinterpretations of Proverbs 29:18, and Acts 1:8. In Proverbs 29:18, it is not unusual for only the first part of the verse to be used. It is usually used to hammer away at the need for a congregation to build a new sanctuary or some similar project. However, only the slightest study will show that an understanding of covenantal terms is under consideration: in the Old Testament time: the Law, and in the New Testament: the faith once delivered to the saints. Those terms being “seen” “envisioned” “understood” in a faithful heart will solidify one to the preservation and reward of a well-lived life.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus said, “. . . and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” In these last instructions to His church, Jesus made simple declarative statements of what will be. It is an error to interpret this as a command. Accordingly, down through the centuries of time, in good times and in bad times, the church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth, has continued to employ the terms of the Great Commission to evangelize, baptize, and teach. This statement is singular but spoken to a congregation; hence, church. It is noted by the KJV discrimination of second person singular and plural (ye, and you). Moreover, every member of that body of Christ fulfills the statement. Truly, we are witnesses, but the question remains, what kind of witness are we?

FOR THOUGHT: What kind of disciple (witness) do you see mostly in folks who claim to be Christian? Is it great, poor, or lukewarm? Do you see what Jesus meant by His statement in Acts 1:8? Does this underscore the need of detailed study of the Word in each disciple? How much study are you giving to the Word in addition to simply reading it?

RACIAL CHARACTERISTICS PRE-DETERMINED

In spite of their exalted stature as great men of God, some have made sinful errors that were, and are, far-reaching. Consider the sin of Adam and Eve. Think about the sin of Abraham and Sarah. Now some will surely think me a self-righteous bigot for what I write, but I stand on the plain truth of the Word of the Lord. Some things are predestined, and what is predestined will be, and that without deviation. Think with me!

God has pronounced blessings on His people of covenant. Those specifically are Israel of the Old Testament and the true church of the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Covenant. He has also pronounced characteristics on some folks that are not desirable, but they are just as true.

Today, the focus of the world is on the middle-east. The problem makers are specific people, from different national boundaries. The Arab people are the offspring of Abraham through his ill-gotten son, Ishmael. The character of Ishmael that he would pass on to his offspring is as certain as the sinful nature that is passed on to all from Adam. That characteristic is noted specifically in Genesis 16:12, *"And the angel of the LORD said to her, Behold, art with child, shalt bear son, shalt call name Ishmael; because the LORD heard affliction. he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren."* The Old Testament word that is translated "wild man" is "Para" and means "wild donkey." It is so translated in the KJV of the Bible some 8-10 times.

As a wild donkey he will not be dependable for policies and treaties over long periods of time. In fact his predestined nature that has held true, and continues to hold true, is that "his hand is against every man, and every man's hand against him." That underscores the difficulties involved by the fact that "he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." So, it is fixed! The nations of earth must do whatever is necessary to co-exist with them until the Prince of Peace returns to earth and sets things exactly right. Like the Gibeonites of old who became a thorn and constant challenge to Israel, so modern Arabs are more than a little challenge to the nations. Perhaps God is using this to goad men in the right direction. The appropriate question might be: is anyone listening!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe the divine pronouncement of specific human characters continues to hold true in their offspring? What about Adam and Eve and the sin they brought upon themselves? Is that still true for every human being? Why?

RECIPE FOR SPIRITUALITY

Among those who are dedicated followers of Christ Jesus, even extending to those who might be classified as nominal Christians, there is a common desire often expressed and somewhat diligently sought. It is to be a truly spiritual disciple. Tragically, men turn to the devices of flesh in the pursuit of greater levels of spirituality. Those things do indeed generate a considerable amount of religious activity: greater offerings, more determination to wear a clean mind, and abandon common carnal thinking and doing. Many such activities may be commendable, but it is also possible that in spite of some laudable activity, spirituality is being sought in all the wrong places. Are you thinking with me about this?

God's people should be aware of a certain passage of scripture, and they should put its suggested activity into action. I refer to I Corinthians 14:12, *"Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church."* What a marvelously simple, but profound idea. Look at it more closely:

1. "Zealous" means to be boiling hot as in an obsessive pursuit.
2. "Spiritual gifts" means the possession of recognized spirituality so bestowed by the Lord.
3. "Seek" means to earnestly diligently search.
4. "Excel" means to do excellently, far above the average.
5. "Edify" means to build up, to enhance reputation.
6. "Church" means the saved, baptized, called out assembly of the Lord Jesus Christ.

With an understanding of the meaning of the terms of this precious verse of scripture, we may restate it in amplified terms in the following manner: "Even so ye (you, plural) are boiling hot in desire and pursuit of spiritual gifts that you and others identify as coming from God, earnestly, diligently search out ways and means to do much more than the average disciple to build up the reputation of the called out assembly of Jesus (the church) as a spiritual institution in the community." What a wonderful, practical way our Lord has chosen to elevate one's spirituality. Every church member ought to be so engaged.

FOR THOUGHT: Faith, facts, and feelings play large roles in discipleship. Too often they are out of order. So, what guides your receptions and decisions about eternal things? Is it what makes you feel good? Is it faith, first? Will you seek bedrock truth (facts), then base your faith on that, and allow that to produce the proper joy (feelings)?

RED ROOVES EVERYWHERE!

On a trip to Australia to be of assistance and encouragement to our missionary, spearheading missionary efforts of the churches of the American Baptist Association to that country, Laura and I found ourselves on a flight with a large number of Australian farmers who were returning from a "round the world" tour of ranches and farms. Their stops in the USA included Amarillo, Texas. They were enamored with the American West. Most of them were wearing bandanas and western boots. One even had a genuine sack of Bull Durham tobacco with the yellow strings hanging out of his shirt pocket. We engaged them in interesting conversation.

As the aircraft approached Australia, I fixed attention on the scenes below with great anticipation. It was then that one of those farmers leaned over my seat and said in a heavy Australian brogue, "Awl ye'll see's red rooves." After asking him to repeat the sentence twice, I finally understood what he was saying. He was right, of course, and I was initially disappointed. I thought the country was sadly lacking in architectural diversity. However, once on the ground that thought changed dramatically. Red tiled rooves may have covered most buildings, but diversity of construction and color pleasantly prevailed.

What an appropriate illustration of "Christianity" this conveyed. Folks under the umbrella of Christianity are so blessed to be there by the shed blood of Christ Jesus on their behalf. But the way some build their life on that foundation is as diverse as those buildings. The range is from magnificent to shabby; practical to gaudy, but mostly far from being a projection of the biblical blueprint. It was our purpose, as well as those who would follow to build according to the biblical blueprint, and not after the whims of men.

That purpose remains! The apostle Paul wrote to the church of the Living God in Corinth, and by proper extrapolation to us all throughout the age, that the church is the building of God. He further stated, *"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon."* I Corinthians 3:9-10.

The apostle went on to write in the following verses just how important it is to build according to the biblical blueprint. Such would be as gold, silver, and precious stones on the day of the Lord. Otherwise, a lot of stained glass and vaulted ceilings where social stability takes precedence over "thus saith the Lord," will be revealed as wood, hay, and stubble. All will be tried by fire. Which do you think will remain and be rewarded?

FOR THOUGHT: How much responsibility do you think you have for learning and following the Lord properly? Are you looking to religious leaders or the Bible itself? Do you seek harmony in what you hear told or preached with the unity of the Bible? What do you think will be the basis of your eternal reward? Do you believe you must live in eternity forever and the reward of righteous living here and now will be a huge consideration without end?

RELIGIOUS RUT AND REVIVAL

A class of learned philosophers would have a verbal field day if asked to define a rut. But, a Southern, homespun definition is more to my liking: a rut is simply a grave with both ends kicked out!

In earlier days of the last century, most roads were dirt beds. In rainy seasons an automobile would make ruts in the mud, then all who came after would drive the ruts for fear of becoming stuck. Before long the ruts deepened, and soon an automobile might actually become stuck in the ruts as the higher center of the road lifted the car, denying traction to the drive wheels; hence, stuck in a rut was an all too common experience. This may serve as an allegory to the course of life. Christians become robotic in a stale routine (rut) until meaningful, vibrant, personal, Christian joy is lost. Enough already!

It is not always a good thing to follow along in ruts someone else has created. If there is fear outside the ruts, there is also the mountaintop blessings of fulfilled purpose. When the disciples in a boat saw Jesus walking towards them on the water, they feared, but the need then as now is for God's people to get out of the boat and into the water. It is called an exercise in personal faith! Moreover, there is no spirit of revival like such faith being exercised.

God would stir us. He would stir us up. Do not pray for a revival for someone else: pray for one for yourself! Inside you resides the gift of God. It is eternal life; it is hope; it is love, power, and a sound mind. These things must not lie dormant, but flow outwardly through genuine dedication to the Savior, and genuine love for lost souls. If that is not happening, it just may be that you have struck high center in the ruts of life. But, there is a remedy. It is the joy of one on one meetings with Jesus: true revival!

The apostle Paul told Timothy, *"Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands."* 2 Tim. 1:6. Who is to take the initiative here? It was Timothy, and it is all of us who wish to live in the true joy of God's blessings. Get out of the rut, and onto the road!

FOR THOUGHT: Why are you what you are? Are you trusting some teacher, preacher or family member? Do you think there is anyone worthy of trust with your never-dying soul other than Him Who died to save it? Is the manner of your life honoring the eternal Creator/Savior? List at least four things in your life that is consistently honoring Jesus.

REMEMBER PEARL HARBOR!

"Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee." Isaiah 49:15.

The Great Depression raged on as this writer discovered America in a small house of no utilities. Memories of the actual bombing of Pearl Harbor elude me, but the war itself was impressed upon me as the armored tanks and soldiers on bivouac so often surrounded that house on the backside of Fort Chaffee. A little blue banner with golden letters hung on the living room wall as it did in so many houses back then. It read: "Remember Pearl Harbor!"

The Japanese act of infamy galvanized a peace loving nation that had managed to stay out of the European Theatre of WWII. Now it would be in war on two fronts as a matter of national survival.

The nation mobilized industry for making war equipment; families moved from the country to the city to help make those things; everyone lived under the belt-tightening rationing of sugar, gasoline, tires, etc. Those who could not go to war, as my dad, went to help build Liberty Ships in San Francisco. It was a unique growing up time for many children. Thank God for truck patch gardens; milk cows, chickens, and a hog or two, and rabbit traps. These were survival commodities. But, I have digressed!

Many years later, I was privileged to visit Hawaii. Attention was paid to the pass through which enemy planes approached the harbor. The Punch Bowl cemetery was especially impressive. Here in the crater of an ancient volcano is one of the most beautiful, final, resting places of young men and women who did not survive that awful day, and many days that would follow; young lives with hopes and dreams snuffed out in a moment of time.

But seeing these was a prelude to the Pearl Harbor Memorial. Standing across the top of the USS Arizona, one can see the outline of the warship below, and an occasional drop of oil still reaches the surface to dispel in an array of colors. Here just a few feet below the surface lies entombed hundreds of brave, young sailors, repelled by the intense heat of flames across the deck sought refuge in rooms below that were watertight. As the ship went down, they were hopeful that rescue would soon appear. Their knocks against the hull of the ship could be detected for up to two weeks. Finally, silence reigned as death mercifully admitted them to realms above. Mentally, I was there. But now, 1 years later, the tears could not be denied as it was my privilege to present U.S. Flags that had flown over the USS Arizona to honor my uncle who was on the beach at Normandy on D-Day Three other uncles served in those days, also my brother who served in the navy during the Korean war.

As I stood on the Pearl Harbor Memorial in numbed silence, I breathed a prayer of thankfulness to God that my life has been so richly blessed. I am forever thankful for the brave young people whose aspirations of life were no different to my own, but who gave the last full measure of devotion. I and others have a wonderful life on top of their sacrifice. I refuse to forget! Also, I am so thankful that our altogether wonderful Savior never forgets any of His children.

FOR THOUGHT: The psalmist would write "Selah!" (just stop and think about that).

REMEMBERING SMYRNA

“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;” Revelation 2:8.

A fairly short distance north of the ancient city of Ephesus lies the ruins of the city of Smyrna. There, a great church of the Lord Jesus Christ was established under the ministry of Paul and his companions. The church at Smyrna is one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation chapters two and three. The message of the Lord to this great church, and to those who would follow after in the same environment was one of great encouragement. They, in their trials were to take a longer look at what was really important, to discern the beginning from the end. Accordingly, Jesus presented Himself to them as the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive. They were assured their trouble was not unnoticed by the Lord. Then, they were admonished to not fear the suffering that was coming. In their poverty, they were accounted as being rich. Moreover, they were promised a crown of life for their faithfulness. What a wonderful message to the church folks in their trials and suffering for the Lord.

It was my privilege to visit this ancient site some years ago. Being on a “Journeys of Paul” tour, Turkey was approached by ship from Greece. As the ship came within a few miles of land, an outline of the modern city of Izmir came into view. The alabaster buildings gleamed in sunlight piercing scattering clouds that had bathed them in fresh, cool rain. In the foreground was the beautiful deep blue water of the Aegean Sea, and above the city in the few remaining clouds a rainbow graced a scene that begged to be on canvas.

Izmir, the surviving, thriving city of ancient Smyrna hosts a population of perhaps two million. When I arrived there, the city had recently installed the first traffic lights, and most did not know what they meant. So the operating law of traffic was who had the loudest horn, and who was bold enough to push forward first. I observed that any desirable dwelling had armed guards patrolling the property however small. Inquiry revealed the country enforced squatter’s rights. Any four walls and roof were home, and occupants could not be moved, so the constant vigil to keep people away.

The ruins of Smyrna are not as prominent or large as some others, but enough remains to testify of a thriving city in which dedicated saints of the Lord paid a heavy price to advance the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our group paused and gave thanks for what the Lord’s church did here among so many enemies of the gospel, even the synagogue of Satan.

Being there was a grim reminder that the more things change, the more they stay the same. Modern churches conquered by the world, and its synagogues of Satan soon turn to belittle, and marginalize true churches who love the Word and seek to advance its cause. Because that cramps their style, their wrath is often incurred. It is just at such a time that the faithfulness of Smyrna should be remembered, and their example followed.

FOR THOUGHT: How much do you know about church history and the price paid in tribulation to advance the gospel? Do you think modern churches abandon the very doctrines and principles for which our forefathers gave their lives? Is your relationship with God and His word meaningful enough for you to take a stand as His disciple?

RE-THINKING THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

As the end of the present age rushes toward closure, the tiny nation of Israel comes ever more into focus politically and religiously. With the mighty nations of earth thousands of times more powerful economically, politically, militarily, and in population, one may wonder why this is so. It is because God has revealed plans for that nation beyond this age. They shall be grafted back into the root from which they were cut, and which the present "Israel," the church now occupies by faith. Rom. 11.

Much is said about ownership of the land mass physical Israel occupies. Arabs claim it as a gift from Abraham their father through his firstborn, Ishmael. On the other hand, present day Jews claim the land as a gift from their father Abraham through Isaac.

God promised that land plus a lot more surrounding it to the seed of Abraham. Therein lies the rub for those whose vision and understanding is limited to fleshly matters.

Nominal Christians, and those whose origin, understanding, and practice is foreign to the New Testament ministry of Jesus, get caught up in the controversy as well.

They fail to understand that God chose to use a distinct, fleshly lineage of people to set the stage of spiritual heritage for His greatest work among mankind, namely His redemptive work in Jesus, and the maturation of disciples in the New Testament Church through His New Testament (covenant). Built by Jesus, the human expression of His New Covenant, His church, was purchased with His own blood. Moreover, it was given extraordinary power by the abiding Holy Spirit, enabling it to persevere throughout all ages. With this in mind, the apostle Paul explained the meaning of the Abrahamic promise. When the promise was made to Abraham's seed, there was never a plurality mentioned, but it was always singular, "Seed." Gal. 3:16 *"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."* He went on to explain that the Seed under consideration all the time was not a nation of fleshly people, but the Seed is specifically Christ Jesus.

He will inherit all that land as well as the nations of this world. The good news is that those who are in Christ will inherit with Him. Those looking for inheritance and legitimacy apart from Christ will find nothing but extreme disappointment.

FOR THOUGHT: How does it make you feel to realize that you may be a recipient of the fullness of the Abrahamic covenant through faith in "The Seed." Does it make you want to learn more and live more fully in the teachings of "The Seed?" How will you begin to do that as an interested disciple?

RETROSPECTION, INTROSPECTION, AND PROSPECTION

Today is the first day of the rest of your life. It is a brand new year. It is a time that naturally lends itself to retrospection, introspection, and prospection. Think about it!

In retrospect, the past year is mentally reviewed. There are failures, shortcomings; sins of commission and omission. But, there are achievements, joys, and the satisfaction those bring as well. Accordingly, the initial days of the New Year are also used to look deep inside for justification or lack thereof of actions past, and dedication with determination to fulfill that which spills over into the New Year undone. Moreover, in prospection the whole New Year is laid out before us all to do the Will of God; to accomplish noble goals that bring honor to Him and to ourselves as well. I do not speak of New Year's Resolutions. Most of those are broken before the first month is finished. Rather I speak of an honest evaluation of time, and life as the Creator has so graciously imparted it into our stewardship.

It is important to not get bogged down in so many things one thinks should be done before embarking on noble goals. God wants commitment from His children, even resolve in faith to put Him and His work first. That done, it is always astounding what God can do, and will do with one in that commitment.

The story is told of a movie producer who spotted a homeless man on the street. He was so non-presentable socially, but the producer told him he wanted to cast him in a movie. He gave him the address to appear the next day, and an advance payment for the job. Later, as the man passed a mirror, he noticed how terribly unkempt he was. So, he took a bath, bought new clothes with his money, and got a haircut. The next day, he arrived at the designated address to be cast in the movie. When asked to identify himself he recounted the encounter the previous day. It was then that the producer said he could not use the man in the movie. He wanted him as he was, not as he had now made himself to appear.

How many times have people proposed to serve God when they get other things done or past actions rectified. It is nothing more than trying to pass a pig off as a lamb. God won't have it. He wants each person as they are. Then He will make them what He wants them to be. The Apostle Paul did not let past things stand in his way. He said, "*... but this one thing I do, forgetting things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*" Phil. 3:13-14. What a marvelous formula of life!!! Let us all choose it as our constraining and motivating guide of our life.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you know that the desire to present oneself to God as being better than he is in the present is one of the most effective tools Satan uses to encourage procrastination? It should be remembered that it is not the healthy that need a physician, but the sick.

REVIEWING PAST ASSESSMENTS

IT'S A COLLECTIVE ANIMAL WORLD

The English language has some wonderfully anthropomorphic collective nouns for the various groups of animals. We are all familiar with a Herd of cattle; a Flock of chickens; a School of fish, and a Gaggle of geese. However, less widely known is a Pride of lions; a Murder of crows (as well as their cousins the rooks and ravens); an Exaltation of doves, and, presumably because they look so wise, a Parliament of owls. Now consider a group of Baboons. They are the loudest, most dangerous, most obnoxious, most viciously aggressive, and least intelligent of all primates. And what is the proper collective noun for a group of baboons? Believe it or not.....a Congress! Is it not weird how this description parallels a branch of government as well as animals? I guess that pretty much explains a lot of the things that come out of Washington! It seems more prominent today than it did years ago.

IT'S A FRUITCAKE WORLD

Well, as the clock struck midnight, officially ending the day, it was much as other days except a few times in recent years those days were supposed to be the end of the world, the return of Jesus, etc. Of course those things did not occur, nor were there many who thought they would, but in retrospect I just need to say: so much for the fruitcakes that know more than Jesus knows (according to them). The world has not ended.....the age is not over... the rapture has not occurred. Did I think it would? Certainly not on the day designated. Has this sort of thing happened before? Yep! Will it happen again? Yep! Why anyone would pay any attention to it underscores biblical ignorance. Well, at least the fruitcakes are proving themselves to be false prophets according to Deut. 18:18-22. Maybe that alone is a good thing.

IT'S AN EDUCATED-BEYOND-INTELLIGENCE WORLD

An intellectual scholar was once described in homespun wisdom as being "educated beyond intelligence." Of course, there is humor in the description, but beyond that, it seems there is also some sobering truth. It occasionally appears that the more a few folks are educated, the more they appear to be ignorant of what is truly important in life.

On the other hand, those hearing the words of the truly wise man, Solomon, will have their feet firmly established in true wisdom. He said, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction."* Proverbs 1:7. Doubtless, the wise man had encountered a few fools in his day, but it is also obvious that he had listened well to his father, King David, who described those who deny their maker in favor of preposterous theories in these words, *"The fool hath said in heart, There is no God..."* Psalm 14:1. The practicality of truth over theory shines so brightly that those who turn from it really do give cause to wonder if they have not been educated beyond their intelligence!

FOR THOUGHT: What are some of the descriptive terms of the world as you see it from time to time? Even so, God so loved the world, not the present system of sin and death, but the inhabitants of it that death eternally claims without faith in Him" Thank God for His love to us!

SANCTIFIED: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE “BE”

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification...” I Thessalonians 4:3. “.. *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*” 2 Thessalonians 2:13.

“Sanctification, sanctify, and sanctified” are terms mentioned often in God’s Word. Moreover, to understand their meaning, one must take into account the triune constitution of every person. The salvation and sanctification of the spirit of man is instantaneous and permanent upon repentance from sin and trusting Jesus as personal Savior. It is then that the continuous battle of the mind-life engages sanctification as a process that leads to justification in the sight of God.

Just what is sanctification and why is it a process? The original language terms of the Bible which are so translated denote “set apart, holy, or hallow.” Of course, in biblical context they denote “with reference to God.” When one is born-again, his spirit is instantly sealed forever (justified) by the Holy Spirit of God, Eph. 4:30. However, the struggle from the new-birth to the grave is lifelong. The Holy Spirit works through the Word to inform, solidify, and restrict the substance and perimeters of life. These things then are referenced as sanctification, or the process of being more and more set aside in the things as the Bible would have all of God’s people to believe and do; the end of which is justification of one’s mind-life on earth. Those who are so sanctified are referenced then as saints, so made by the work of God from within, and not by the silly conferring of the title by other sinful men. As the apostle Paul stated, “*But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.*” I Cor. 1:30.

In the Lord’s prayer, He prayed that the Father would bless His church, saying, “*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*” To this Paul adds of the work of Jesus for His church, “*That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.*” Eph. 5:26.

Finally, sanctified people have an important act of sanctification to accomplish themselves. I Peter 3:15 states it forcefully, “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*” “Sanctified;” it is an important Bible “Be” for every disciple of Christ.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you fully realize that God’s loving provisions for man is not only salvation of his never-dying spirit, but also of his mind-life, and ultimately his body, too? Where are you in this relationship with God? Are you spiritually saved? Are you living for God by seeking to discipline yourself through His word as a disciple? Are you actually expecting a new, immortal, incorruptible body after your present corruptible one expires? Do you see a process of sanctification in all this?

SAVORING GOOD SUCCESS

"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." Joshua 1:8

The context of the verse above finds the children of Israel poised on the eastern shores of the Jordan River. Moses is dead and Joshua is assuming the leadership role as they began the conquest of the land they had left Egypt to inhabit some 40 years previously. What were his thoughts? We can only imagine, but we do know that God spoke to him in a most encouraging manner, a part of which includes the above verse.

No leader, whether military, political, religious or of another field of endeavor wants to be a failure. Success is always desired. Certainly, Joshua wanted to be successful. After all, he and his friend Caleb were now the only two men living who had lived in Egypt, and survived the 40 years of wandering. He wanted to lead successfully, and to see the Hebrews settled into, and enjoying the Promised Land.

It is here, then that the term success appears for the one and only time in the Bible. To achieve it he must not allow the Law of God to depart from his daily speech. He must meditate in it day and night. The deep thinking referred to as meditation comes from the Hebrew word "Hagah" which means to become so engrossed in thought as to mutter aloud over the enormity of fixed focus and joy that grabs the soul! Indeed, this continues to be the recipe for Christian success. There are those who think that God gave the rules of the Christian life, but left them in charge of His Word to change it as they see fit. NOT SO! God's recipe for success for Joshua is our recipe for success today. Study the Word! Do not turn from it to the right or left! Keep it in the forefront of the mind, and speak of its content often.

Solomon reiterated the same principle of success in somewhat different terms, but with the same meaning. He said, *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."* Prov. 3:5-6.

Too many folks equate success as material accumulation, or achievement of prideful power. Such should remember that these are useless when they are in a coffin, and there are no U-Haul trailers attached to a hearse! This does not mean there is nothing to take with you into eternity. In fact there is much! But, it will not be anything material; it will be spiritual success, or the lack thereof that one must meet at the Judgment Seat of Christ, over which to rejoice in reward or to weep as the meaning of their life on earth is consumed as wood, hay, and stubble. Are you living in a manner to achieve success in life, and to enjoy its fruit for eternity? Repent of sins, claim Jesus as your personal Savior, follow Him in scriptural baptism, fellowship regularly in His church, learn the Bible. Nothing in life is more important than these things.

FOR THOUGHT: Success is easily definable in earthly things, but what about spiritual things? Are you living a successful life as a disciple of Jesus? Do you wish to start doing so? Are you trusting Jesus as your personal Savior? Then will you begin to study and employ the teachings of Jesus more fully in your life?

SEPARATE: AN ESSENTIAL BIBLE “BE”

Often repeated in Holy Writ is the Bible imperative: “Be Ye Separate.” In the earliest stages of Bible reading, it becomes obvious that the objective of God for His people is NOT the creation of a comfort zone in a God-rejecting, hell-bound world. This may be a shocking viewpoint to non-bible reading church members whose source of religious information is limited to the homiletic platitudes of a materially gluttonous clergy. For them, the call to separation is mostly avoided due to its conflict with the flesh, and its being out of sync with a fleshly, flighty world of make believe Christians who love their religious country-club-called-church. Think with me!

From the earliest stages of God’s covenant work with men, the paramount call is to separation. God called Abraham to leave Ur of Chaldea, and He taught the Israelites in their exodus, “. . . *I am the Lord your God, which have you from other people.*” Lev. 20:24.

When Judah returned from Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem, Nehemiah 9:2 records, “*And the seed of Israel themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.*” Then in 13:3 it further states, “*Now it came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they from Israel all the mixed multitude.*”

But it is not just Old Testament stuff! The New Testament underscores separation as essential to living the Christian life. The apostle Paul wrote adamantly to the church at Corinth, “*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.*” 2 Cor. 6:17.

The idea of Christian separation is not to isolate oneself from the world as the proverbial, monastery monk, but to be separated by believing and employing in an evil world the life- teachings of the Lord . Paul went on to explain this to the church at Corinth: “*I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.*” 1 Cor. 5:9-10. It is the separated life of Christians that brings them spiritual joy. It is also that which the Holy Spirit uses to convict and attract lost ones to His fold.

Let those who take the name of Christ then hear the clarion declaration of beloved John as he penned, “*But if we walk in, as he is, we have fellowship one with another, and of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*” 1 John 1:7. One does not walk in that light with one foot while the other foot is walking comfortably in step with a wicked world of darkness. “*Be ye separate!*” It is an essential Bible “Be!”

FOR THOUGHT: Do you understand the call to separation for God’s people is not the New Birth though predicated upon it? Is not separation speaking of how one lives? Does this not underscore understanding and employing the practical teaching of Jesus day by day? What is different about your life that men might consider you to be separated unto the Lord?

SHIRLEY, GOODNEY, AND MARCY

One day, at the reading of the 23rd Psalm, and not being used to hearing the words in the format of verse six, a youngster heard “*Surely, goodness, and mercy,*” as “Shirley, Goodney, and Marcy” and wondered just why they would want to follow him around all the days of his life. This underscores just how easy it is for some to misunderstand in the best of environments, particularly if the reader does not observe punctuation. Little pauses of the lack thereof can mislead the hearer.

It is interesting to note that the Psalmist, King David, the author of the 23rd Psalm, lived under the economy of the Mosaic Law. He was keenly aware of the unbending austerity of Law, but he also knew much about grace and mercy, due to his unique relationship with the God of those attributes. Doubtless, he was immersed in the marvelous thoughts of these things as he penned those beloved words.

Some time ago, a lawyer friend of mine arose from our early morning coffee and announced his need to leave early. He was to substitute for a court judge that day. I remarked that I hoped he would show mercy in the cases before him. To this he replied that mercy has nothing to do with law. If mercy is introduced into a case it necessitates the setting aside of law. He was right of course, even as the Bible forthrightly states in James 2:13b. Judgment is on the basis of law; however, “. . . *Mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*”

The Shepherd King began his writing of many psalms by underscoring the blessedness of the man who meditated in the law of the LORD day and night. Truly, the law of the LORD is holy and righteous, and much to be desired as it is “*our schoolmaster that brings us to Christ.*” Gal. 3:24. But rejoicing over and above the righteousness of the law is that rejoicing in the indisputable, consistent, and unparalleled goodness and mercy following those who sit at His feet all the days of their life. “. . . *mercy rejoiceth against judgment.*” We all do well to join the ranks of those who do not wish to receive what they deserve in life, (the judgment of law) choosing rather to bask in mercy, grace, and their goodness. This is our blessed privilege through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the demands of law for us.

FOR THOUGHT: Have you ever heard anyone say, “All I want is what I deserve.”? Have you said that? Do you realize that all men are sinners, and sinners deserve the devil's hell? When did you last pause and simply rejoice that you bask in the grace of the Loving God?

SIMEON: A MODAL FOR GOD'S PEOPLE IN EVERY GENERATION

List your top twenty heroes of the Bible. Is it difficult? There are so many! Some come readily to mind, others require some thought, and all of them have such desired qualities of life in spite of the difficulties they bore. Is ancient Simeon one of them? Probably not! If not, then think again. He is a model for us all in every generation.

Simeon was an old man as the spotlight of Holy Writ fell upon him. What that light in Lu. 2:25-34 tells all ensuing generations is:

- * He was a resident of Jerusalem.
- * He was just and devout.
- * He patiently waited for the consolation of Israel.
- * The Holy Ghost was upon him.
- * He received knowledge from the Holy Ghost that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ.
- * He came by the Spirit into the Temple.
- * He saw and touched Jesus.
- * He announced Him as the salvation of the Lord, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of Israel.
- * He being fulfilled prayed to depart this world in peace.

Now, let's dare to make a comparison of modern saints for the modal. Like him, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is old. It has trod a 2,000 year trail of hardship, persecution, and faith. And now it is largely rejected by the younger generation as pews are filled with mostly older, gray-haired folks. But notice:

- * We are residents ,through promise, of New Jerusalem, the mother of us all. Gal. 4:26.
- * True saints are just and devout, and will not have sin imputed to them. Rom. 4:8.
- * We wait for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Thess. 3:5.
- * The Holy Spirit is within the saved, and upon His churches. Jn. 14:17.
- * Some of this generation will not taste death until they have seen Him come. Matt, 24:34
- * We are brought by the Spirit into the New Testament Temple. Jn. 16:13.
- * We have seen and been touched by Jesus in the Spirit by faith. Jn. 14:23.
- * We proclaim Him as the only hope of salvation, the light of the world, and the glory of God. Jn. 14:6.
- * Being fulfilled, we shall indeed depart this world in peace, and our eyes shall behold him and not another, Job 19:27.

Whether the Lord returns this year, or a later year, the time is doubtlessly close, and Simeon provides an admirable modal of life for us all who long for His coming.

FOR THOUGHT: Have you ever considered Simeon as a model for us in the present time? How does your life line up with the characteristics of Simeon? How does your church line up with those characteristics? Identify shortcomings and seek to rectify them.

SIN AND RIGHTEOUSNESS SIMPLIFIED

"I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah." Psalm 32:5.

It is true that some folks have the mindset of concrete: thoroughly mixed up and profusely set. They would argue with the proverbial signpost, but they cannot argue with God, neither may they box with Him because their arm is too short! So, it is not the burden of men to convince one another that they are sinners. The Holy Spirit witnesses that in every heart. But the idea of sin may be better understood in the simplistic terms of "Use" and "Misuse." Think about it!

Get it straight, and never forget it! God is righteous, but men are not. If men are not righteous; they are sinners, big time! Some jovial chap will roar that all sin is sin, and there is no difference! Others will say that there is no difference to God. I find it amusing that so many seem to know the mind of God in these matters without a specific scripture reference. Stay with me for a moment.

If all sin is the same, why are there at least three categories of it: transgression, iniquity, and sin? Psalm 32:5. If all sin is the same, why were some sins worthy of death, and others could be atoned for? If all sin is the same why did Jesus say the Pharisees would receive the greater condemnation? Certainly, one sin of any sort severs one from God as Adam and Eve sinned in Eden. But, beyond that the saints have to deal with their sinful nature every day of their life, and there is a wide array of sins. So leaving "Iniquity" and "Transgression" for another time, let us focus on the term "Sin."

"Sin" means "to miss the mark!" To miss the mark of anything assumes the mark was intended to be hit, but missed. Thus, sin is the misuse of every possible thing in life.

Think about the common sins of men. "Greed" is the misuse of things material or immaterial acquired in access, and restricted to the individual, when enough of those things are already made available for one to serve and honor God day by day. It is use vs misuse. Alcohol and drugs were made by the same God who created everything else. They have a purpose: medicinal, not recreational. It is a simple matter of use vs misuse. Sexual activity was created to insure the survival of the species, thus placed within honorable perimeters. Outside of those perimeters it is misuse; hence, sin. Language may be loving or vile; a matter of use vs misuse. Human Relationships may be gentle, kind and loving, or abusive, harsh, and mean. It is a matter of emotional use vs misuse. In the wide spectrum of all things, the apostle Paul boldly declared, *"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."* 1 Cor. 10:23. In short, all things God created have purpose and rightful use, but the practice of men has established misuse; it does not edify; simply put, it is sin!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you ever misuse things or people? Have you learned that misuse is sin? Think about common sins of misuse in your life. How may you correct these?

SIN, INIQUITY, TRANSGRESSION, A MORAL VACUUM

"I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah." Psalm 32:5.

Whoa! Hold on there! Wrongdoing is wrongdoing isn't it? That is a good question, but while it is recognized that all manner of sin is wrongdoing, we must also learn that we are helped in coping with our nature by understanding biblical categories of wrongdoing. So we look at portions of scripture such as Psalm 32:5 and wonder: is David doing double talk, or is there a lot to learn from these selected terms? Let us take a closer look.

David said: *"I acknowledge my sin unto thee..."* Sin, in the ancient language of the Hebrews, is "Chattah" and means to miss the goal or mark of duty. It also connotes the acquisition of resultant guilt from missing said mark or goal. It is perhaps the best umbrella word for all things wrong, but may be rightfully used to designate the result of other specific acts of wrongdoing, for whatsoever is not of faith is sin, or missing the mark, or the goal of God's plan for one's life.

David went on to say: *"... and mine iniquity have I not hid. . ."* Iniquity in the Hebrew language is "Avaw," meaning to bend, twist, or distort. In Greek of the New Testament, it is "Anomia," meaning no law or contemptuous of law, willingly ignorant of law (God's laws in particular) in favor of one's own views. This is as the old saying, "My mind is made up, please don't confuse me with the facts." It is an apt description of today's diverse "Christian" world.

David continued to say: *"... I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord. . ."* Transgression in Hebrew is "Pasha." It means to revolt; to rebel. This term denotes that one has a proper understanding of law, especially God's law, and rejects it for what is more humanly palatable. In the New Testament Greek, it is "Parabasis" and means the same thing as the Hebrew term.

David concluded: *"... and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah"* Just stop and think about that!

So, in expanded, modern language, David said: "I own up to missing God's goal for my life, and I will lay open the substituting of God's ways through willful ignorance, and in favor of my own. I said I will confess my rebellion, and revolt against God's Word, and You forgave my forging ahead in my own judgment willingly ignoring Yours, which constitutes my missing the mark or goal that You have for my life. Selah! (Just stop and think about that!)" What a great and wonderful God we have

FOR THOUGHT: What do you think of the distinct categories of wrong doing that David expressed in Psalm 32:5? Can you identify your specific participation in all three? Which of these three do you believe to be most common among church folks?

SIN, SOFTNESS, SABOTAGE, AND SALVATION

"And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man." Genesis 9:5-6.

Hundreds of years before God gave the Hebrews the Old Testament Law, He set the cornerstone for the progress of civilization: capital punishment, Genesis 9:5-6. Additionally, His view of the criminal deeds of mankind is blatantly underscored in Holy Writ. Additionally, His instructions to His people included plain information about how to put evil away from them. Deut. 17-22. Parents were charged with the responsibility of turning in incorrigible children, even consenting to their just death, Deut. 21:20. One may protest that those instructions were valid under the Mosaic Law, and not under the dispensation of Grace. That would be correct other than the Genesis 9 reference which was hundreds of years before the law. But the question remains, "has God's viewpoint toward sin and evil changed, or our responsibility lessened?" Obviously it has not changed since He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Are you thinking with me?

As the time of man's rule on earth comes speedily to an end, Satan has worked hard to inundate the world with material things. This has been a most effective softening tactic. For far too many it has crippled the will to be responsible; to clearly delineate right from wrong; to call sin what it is, and to maintain law and order on the Judeo-Christian foundation of civilization. So, the world, and particularly our nation sinks further each year into the quagmire of evil and degradation by rejecting the principles that make a nation great. Demonstrations abound of specific intent to sabotage order. This can only result in national and global anarchy as a ready stage for a dictator, the likes of which has yet to be seen on the world scene.

The good news is that although the sun may be going down on this age of grace, it is still called today. Let the people of God everywhere be patient and faithful to sound the warning of the last days: *"harden not your heart as in the provocation."* Psalm 95:8; Heb. 4:7. Let the words of the wise man, Solomon, be heard: *"Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people."* Prov. 14:34. I am grateful to God that the old ship of Zion still sails faithfully upright at Francois Missionary Baptist Church. Let us pray for the strengthening of others in the Lord!

FOR THOUGHT: Did Israel repeatedly forget God and turn to the common sins of the world throughout the Old Testament? Did God judge and punish them for it? What do you think will happen to churches, who have more responsibility under grace, will face in judgment? Will God's judgment linger indefinitely?

SIR, WE WOULD SEE JESUS!

In modern churches it seems much has been lost in the last few generations. Great spiritual joys have given way to mere acquiescence and the ascendancy of things of fleshly pleasure. Although giant steps of progress are evident in material things: contrived programs, and social relaxation, one is left to wonder if creature comforts should be termed "progress." Think with me about this for a moment.

At the Triumphal Entry of Jesus, Jerusalem's attention was centered upon Him, His raising of Lazarus, and the many things He had said and done. Most were extremely happy, but some were caught up in bitter hatred and selfishness. In this context, the Bible says, "*And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.*" John 12:20-21.

What a refreshing request both for then and now. Modern churchgoers look at a physical building and determine, "Is it nice, new, comfortable? Does it show evidence that someone is investing a lot of money into it that I can enjoy?" The list of qualifications to satisfy the demands of their potential membership goes on to include popularity, and the possibility of forging friendships with business possibilities. It must be big enough for one to hide himself from responsibilities, while offering programs for all ages, and feature a pleasant, politically correct, totally inoffensive name. On, and on, it goes ad nauseam!

Now before someone gets excited about criticizing the folks described, it must be recognized that churches abound which are working hard to make exactly that impression on those outside the membership. But do such churches own up to the bible and Jesus as their head? Well, yes, of course they affirm that as basic, fundamental, but it may be so basic and fundamental that it is hardly mentioned. They assume it to be a given: so there is no need to major on it anymore; it is time to move on to things of quicker and keener interest.

Could it possibly be that in shifting emphasis from the spiritual to the social that purpose and mission have been practically abandoned? Moving on from Jesus is always moving on too far. Besides, others will do the creature comfort game better. The ancient Greeks' request might be embarrassing to a lot of churches today, but it is still appropriate: "*Sir, we would see Jesus.*"

FOR THOUGHT: Do you think material things such as stained glass windows and pipe organs are allowed to get in the way of in-depth Bible presentation and fellowship? Do you think Jesus would be welcomed into many churches today with His preaching that He would not abandon? Why were the Grecian Jews desiring to see Jesus over and above the religious activity that was going on that day?

SIZING DOWN GOD

At various times and in sundry circumstances the measure of another person is taken.. Perhaps it is to recognize talents and abilities, or to evaluate and praise good deeds accomplished, or other reasons. We want to be as kind and liberal as possible in taking such measures. In quite serious situations such as facing surgery and needing a surgeon, we tend to become more critical in taking such measures, understandably so. Taking the measure of another may also be expressed as sizing one up. That has a positive ring to it, and if there are not too many “buts” in the sizing, and the pure and simple truth is expressed, it is a good thing. Otherwise, such action might be better expressed as sizing one down. Generally speaking, how do men take the measure of the Son of God? Let’s think about this one!

The writer of the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus is the express (pushed out) image of the invisible God. However, His own people did a disastrous job of taking His measure. They were looking for a handsome, charismatic king. Should they have known better? Certainly so! The great prophet Isaiah plainly declared, “...and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” Isa., 53:2. And that He would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

The erroneous measure continues! Men attribute to God the thinking of a man. They think that surely God will bend the rules, and make exceptions for them when He learns their circumstances (as if He does not know every detail). Such is a plain and simple “sizing down” of God which will not stand. They fail to consider Numbers 23:19, “*God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?*” In taking the measure of the Creator God, one will do well to listen to Isaiah 55:8-9: “*For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*”

Science tells us that the nearest star to earth is four light-years away. Since light travels at the speed of 186,000 miles per second, that makes it a very long distance. There is no telling the distance of so many others. This is God’s explanation to us of how far above us He is in every regard, especially in thoughts and ways. And some would make a glorified man of Him?!??? Please, please rethink your sizing of Him and make it up instead of down. A reading of Isaiah 6:1-9 will be most helpful in the process. Then, as the apostle Peter said, “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.*” I Peter 3:15. Doubtless, the world will continue to size God downward, but to its own hurt. Let those who know Him learn enough to always size Him UP!!!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe that God may of His own volition or that of men in prayer be persuaded to act contrary to His word? Do you think He will bend His stated will for men out of sympathy at judgment? What are you doing both to learn and do His will as one of His disciples?

SLEEPING LIFE AWAY

The frivolous charge of sleeping one's life away is often hurled toward young folks who have the capacity to sleep long hours, but some folks are actually doing it while maintaining a high degree of activity. Simply put, there is no sleep to be compared to spiritual sleep. In it one slumbers in utter unawareness of impending judgment as he lives what is called the "good life" of material abundance.

In that state, the only arousing cause is a threat to a material comfort zone. But, it is met with an intensity determined to eliminate any alternative to the status quo. If one does not see a way to end the threat, he will continue on in denial that any effective, major change will occur. I write of nothing new, but of a repetitive occurrence in the annals of history. Please think with me on this matter.

Certainly, this was the case of the antediluvian world in the days of Noah. They knew not until the flood came and took them away. It is not that they were unexposed to the Word and ways of God, but that they preferred the sweet slumber of material and sensual deception to the ways of righteousness. One cannot help but be impressed with the same thing repeatedly occurring in the days of the Judges of Israel. However, the generations following the establishment of the Throne of David and Solomon, must have thought they finally had God franchised: that He would do nothing without consulting them first. So their love of the world plunged them ever deeper into spiritual slumber, so deeply in fact, that they could not recognize the consultation of God when He sent it to them.

It was the last days of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The practice of God's people was evil continuously. Please note the writings of Jeremiah Five. God instructed the prophet: *"Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it."* Jer. 5:1. How sad! That nation of Abraham which had produced paragons of faithful men had become so low that there was not "A MAN" practicing righteousness by which the judgment of God might be averted. They were worse off than ancient Sodom and Gomorrah that did not have ten, but did at least have a man. While Israel slept, Babylon was readying itself, a mighty, warring nation whom God would use to chastise his people in ways that would not be paralleled until Roman times.

In like manner, the spiritual backsliding and slumber of former giants of the faith among American churches is to be rightfully lamented, but this also underscores the importance of a small remnant clinging to the precious Word; living righteously, judging righteously, and being spiritual lights in dark places.

Presently, the hour is late! Then let the words of the apostle Paul to the Ephesians be both heard and heeded: *"...Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give the light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is."* 5:14-17

FOR THOUGHT: What do you think it will take, if anything, to awaken sleeping churches and individual Christians to their God-given purpose? Do the many backslidings and sleeping of God's people in Old Testament times mean anything at all to you? What?

SOURCE OR FACILITATOR?

From the inspired pages of antiquity there comes powerful, spiritual lessons for individuals and churches in today's Christian world. Consider the symbolism of the candlestick, It is chief among the many objects used to identify, and to illustrate the Lord's New Testament Church. It was the instrument of light in the Holy Place of the wilderness tabernacle and later the Old Testament Temple. Among misunderstandings about the candlestick is that it is a light source. Now hold on! Think with me!

The candlestick of Bible times references the Jewish menorah. But the menorah (candlestick) was not a light source as many presume. Rather it was a light facilitator. That is, it was especially constructed for the purpose of facilitating the flow of oil through its pipes to the terminal bowls where it was ignited. It was the fire then produced by the combustible oil that created the light. The portable construction of the candlestick allowed positioning for light in specific places. In like manner, the Lord's church, metaphorically called a candlestick, is not of itself a light producer. It is a facilitator of God's light of truth to a lost, dark, sinful world of condemned men. The light it can only offer is the light (truthful content) of God's Word, and its effects on life. The church supports the veracity of the Holy Word, by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that has resided within and upon it since Pentecost. Additionally, it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to give understanding through the Word to saved men, and to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment to come. As men repent of sin and are enlightened by the Holy Spirit through the Word, they are not to obscure that light, but to be joined to the candlestick thus becoming a part of the great conduit/facilitator of truth and light. As it is written in 2 Corinthians 4:6, *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

In the first half of the last century, light in homes was furnished by burning oil in glass lamps. Sometimes that process blackened the chimneys of the lamps requiring them to be cleaned frequently. That process ignored, the lamp ceased to be an acceptable facilitator of light. Sometimes, the appearance of men to others is that of a dimmed light; a life that needs the cleaning of repentance and forgiveness. Christians are not light sources. But the question remains: how are they as facilitators? How bright or dimmed is the light of the candlestick? God help us all to be clean, excellent facilitators of the heavenly light!

FOR THOUGHT: "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine" are words to a popular, Christian song for children. Does your light shine for Jesus? If your light were the only one in your world, would it be reflective of Bible truth, or does the chimney need cleansing? Outline steps you can take to improve on that.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES AS OLD AS GENESIS

When one studies the subject of “unknown tongues,” it is important to know that the term “unknown” is not found with “tongues” in the original language of the scriptures. Rather it has been supplied by translators, and serves only to confuse the English reader. It is also most important to know that the term “tongue” is a metonymy of speech for “language.” However, that being said, if one speaks in a language not understood by the hearer, it is by that context unknown.

God is the author of language. He instilled it in Adam and Eve, and for the next 1700 years, the world was of one language. However, the determination of the post-flood world caused God to instantly implement several languages to separate the people, and to stop their ecumenical madness at Babel. *“Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech.”* Genesis 11:7. Then, since they could not understand one another on a large scale, their speech was truly “unknown tongues,” but not in a language unknown to segments of the population. It was by language (tongues) that they were separated and grouped.

God repeated the miraculous feat at Pentecost (Acts 2) as the church was baptized in the Holy Spirit power, and many languages (nationalities of people) were represented there who heard as well as witnessed the Word and power of God. This is underscored by the statement, “how hear we every man in his own language?” Acts 2:8. Thus it was not languages unknown to men, but rather unstudied, and unlearned by those who spoke them. Then the question arises: was it a miracle of hearing or a miracle of language. Let it be underscored that it was, as the Bible states, one of languages. There were many speakers that day on Pentecost. Some casual observers initially thought they heard the babbling of drunks, but upon closer observation, as well as the explanation of the Apostle Peter, they understood that different languages were being spoken simultaneously by several speakers, so that hearers of different languages did in fact hear in their own language and understood what they heard.

To speak in a language that others do not understand is useless, and senseless, and denounced in the scriptures. Still, the unstudied and unlearned insist on attributing the activities of confusion to the Lord Who plainly teaches us that the author of confusion, He is NOT! I Cor. 14:33. There is no great mystery about what happened on Pentecost, or how God used the first church for the initial outreach of Christianity, but there were miraculous abilities given of strict order by which God is always defined. Thus, as Paul so plainly puts it, “Let all things be done decently, and in order.” I Cor. 14:40

FOR THOUGHT: Who do you credit as the author and sustainer of heretical religion? Is it the righteous, creator God who cannot lie? Is it fallen Lucifer who seeks to undo the work and plan of Jesus? Your answer will reveal much in discipleship. Do you believe the brief exposition offered in this article is truth or falsehood? Why?

SPIT ON ME LORD

"And if he that hath the issue spit upon him that is clean; then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and be unclean until the even." Lev. 15:8.

Since the first biblical usage of the term "spit" in the verse above, it has been regarded as an unsanitary, disgusting, form of rejection. Jesus suffered this form of abuse among many others before His crucifixion, Isa. 50:6, Matt 26:67, Mark 14:65, Luke 18:32, etc.

A most interesting usage of spittle is that of the Divine. In the course of ministry, Jesus came into contact with a blind man. Jesus made an ointment of clay upon which He spat. He then anointed the eyes of the blind man with that, and He instructed him to go wash in the pool of Siloam. The man above legal age, who had been blind from birth, then came seeing and rejoicing. Ironically, this very incident created great controversy among the legalist Pharisees because it was done on the Sabbath day. However they were pre-dispositional to everything about Jesus anyway. How wonderful then is the reply of the man who had gained sight upon being questioned. "... *one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see,*" John 9:25

More than once the question has been posed: "Why did Jesus use such a disgusting method to bring such a blessing? He is God. Could He not have simply rebuked the blindness, and the man would have had sight?" The answer to the latter part of the question is an emphatic "Yes." But there are other things to learn here.

Since spittle is a global form of rejection, Jesus rejected the blindness using this form. Ultimately all things wrong are attributable to sin, and in this instance Jesus rebuked and rejected the sin that deprived the man of sight, and had done so since birth.

All of us are afflicted with sin. That sin creates a lot of tragedy, and manifests itself in various ways, but Jesus is the conqueror of sin. He took the spittle of men, the awful, cruel mockery, beatings, and crucifixion in my place because of my sin. Jesus must reject, rebuke both the sin that condemns our never dying spirits, as well as the sin that makes its appearance in our lives in spite of all we can do to prevent it. But that rejection, rebuke, brings the cleanliness, joy, peace, and spiritual sight so desperately needed by all who would be His disciples.

In view of this wonderful truth, I pray for my Lord to spit on me, Not just on my eyes, but on my flesh, on my sin, on my lack of understanding. Rebuke it for the glory of God, and for the unparalleled peace and joy His cleansing brings. Would you stand still for that? Every person must or lose big time. Is there any doubt that the blind man would do that all over again?

FOR THOUGHT: What are your thoughts on Divine Expectoration being used to restore sight to the blind man? Do you understand and appreciate the symbolism of it? Why do you think anyone would reject such an application if it were available today? Do you think the blind man who was restored sight would do it again if he could see what Jesus was doing?

STEADFAST: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE “BE”

The pattern is set for the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ by the status and actions of the first one. It is interesting and comforting to note that in Acts 2:42, *“And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* They were steadfast in doctrine, in fellowship, in breaking of bread, and in prayers! Here then is a ready-made sermon outline, and a magnificent example for church folk throughout the age. Think with me about steadfastness, an important Bible “BE” of discipleship.

The idea of steadfastness is underscored in warning. Hebrews 2:1-3 states, *“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;”*

The warning continues in personal introspection as the apostle Peter writes in 2 Peter 3:17, *“Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.”* The warning is emphasized due to the cunning craftiness of the devil himself. Thus he also said, *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”*

Perhaps the bottom line of encouragement in steadfastness is spoken by Paul in I Cor, 15:58, *“ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”*

Folks who claim to be Christian, but do not attend their church worship services except now and then; who are too lazy or too carnal to read the Bible and pray are not being steadfast. The time will definitely come when that will cost them much more than they can now imagine.

How much better it is for God’s people both now and hereafter that they should learn from the Bible pattern. In that first church, *“They continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”* Steadfast! It is an important Bible “Be” of discipleship.

FOR THOUGHT: Temptations are multiplied, and they call repeatedly to everyone. Do you find it easy to yield to temptations not so much to overtly sin as to seek material and social status in a quest that demands all of your time and attention, leaving the Bible and church matters behind? How does that square with the idea of Christian Steadfastness?

STIRRING UP YOUR COMFORT ZONE

The Lord spoke of His people Israel in the following terms: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him." Deut. 32:11-12

Nature teaches much to the discerning mind. Additionally, God often used the nature of plants, animals, and fowl to teach spiritual lessons to His people. Certainly, this verse is a classic case that merits meditation and appreciation.

The eagle builds its nest high, away from would be predators. It is made of strong material initially, then padded with softer material, and lastly, lined with soft down from the adult eagle's body. It is warm, cozy, comfortable, an ideal place for eggs to hatch into little eaglets. Moreover, as the tiny birds grow, food is brought to them, even dropped into their mouth. Life is good! It is a perfect welfare state requiring no initiative from the little eaglets, but to receive what is brought to them.

But it is not the purpose of the eaglets to remain nest bound, and the subject of constant attention and basic care. Soon, it is time for the little eaglet to become an eagle. Lesson one is the stirring of the nest. Surely, that will entice the eaglet out of it. But not so! Eaglet is not leaving this nest even if it has become uncomfortable. Next, comes the stripping of the down. Now that creates an unbearable setting. The woven briars are not nearly as desirable as the soft down. Finally, the eaglet is enticed to come aboard the spread wings of mother eagle. The next step is perhaps most frightening. Eaglet is taken high above the earth and dumped. As it falls, it begins to flap its little wings. If at first it does not fly, mother eagle will swoop down beneath it to catch it on its mighty wings, and take it up for another try. Thus does the first step toward fulfilling purpose in life find fulfillment. Others will follow, especially that of hunting and captivating food. Finally, little eaglet is little eaglet no more, but a mature bird enabled to sustain itself and continue the cycle of life for which it is intended.

When God stirs up your comfort zone, it is usually not exciting, and may even be objectionable, at least initially. But God knows the great potential that lies in each of His dear children. Often we are moved through hardship, heartache, tragedy, and challenge to achieve a high level of spiritual maturity that allows us to fulfill the reason and purpose of being on the planet. So, the next time adversity visits, rather than drown in lamentation and self pity, let the excitement of the higher unknown prevail. God is stirring up your comfort zone for purpose, even a lofty purpose for which you shall later praise His name in gladness.

FOR THOUGHT: As a disciple of our Lord, have you loved the status quo of your church that you actually resisted change as a disturbance to your comfort zone? Do you believe that many Christians reach a plateau of fundamental doctrines of Christ, and cease growing because such would disturb their comfort zone? Do you desire to increase knowledge, and grow in grace even if it changes your life enough to disturb your comfort zone?

SUBLIMATING SLIME

“ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” Philippians 4:8.

The Christian warfare is a personal struggle that would detract from the marvelous, spiritual life people of God are called to live. It is not unique to anyone, rather it is universal to spiritual people bound in a fleshy body with carnal, mental capability. I Cor. 10:13 puts it this way, *“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”* The pious need not deny its presence. John said, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”* I John 1:8. But the good news is that there is universal help to all God's people, allowing them to win in the struggle. Moreover, the apostle encourages us all by freely confessing the problem was his as well. He said, *“For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.”* Thus are we to expect the challenges of this warfare, and to requisition the necessary help to win.

Consider this: when friends visit, we welcome and entertain them, and hope they'll call again. But, the same cannot be said about undesirable visitors. If we warmly welcome them into our lives it can be very difficult to get them to leave. Entertaining visitors is similar to entertaining thoughts. We have to be very discerning about what thoughts we choose to entertain. If we welcome undesirable thoughts they'll soon become unwelcome guests. Entertaining such thoughts as worry, judging, jealousy, bitterness, lust, pride and so on, only encourages them to make themselves at home. Don't give them space, let alone the easy chair. Once entrenched, it is immensely difficult to get them to leave. Consciously choosing to replace a negative with a positive is a powerful answer. It is called sublimation.

Sublimation is the act of putting down undesirable things, but always replacing them with higher, more noble things. With God's help each of His dear children may sublimate the slime of life by using what He revealed in Philippians 4:8. *“ Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”* Then sublimate the slime with noble, charitable, godly thoughts.

FOR THOUGHT: I Peter 1: 13 say in part, “. . .Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind,. . .” What do you think he meant by that? How much responsibility do you think one has for what goes on in his mind? Do you actively practice sublimation?

SUM TOTAL OF SIN: EYE, FLESH, PRIDE OF LIFE

“Sin” basically means “to miss the mark.” A target, practice, shooter who aims yet misses, may rightfully say, “I sinned!” But while technically correct, “sin” is a word especially applied to the spiritual world. Specifically, it means to miss the mark of God's will for one's life. To miss that mark, to find oneself outside of the will of God, makes one to be exposed, and guilty of an extremely wide variety of activities that, sooner or later, bring destruction in one form or another. So why would anyone desire to be in such a position? It is because sin is presented as the means to achieve a selfish goal. Outside the will of God, life is extremely a selfish existence. Most often one deems that selfish goal to be pleasant, good, and desirable, but the end result is hidden from view to the unwise. To understand the motivations to sin, one need only look to the fountainhead of sin in the human family.

When mother Eve was faced with that monumental decision to transgress the law of God, or to think in terms of serving herself, she was led most masterfully in the temptation. Based on the subtle lie Satan fed her, the motivations found their place in full force. 1) She saw that the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was good for food; 2) that it was pleasant to the eyes, and 3) that it was desirable to make one wise. Genesis 3. She could not see that exercising this option would forever seal her life in sin, and unlike God, not be able to leave off the evil and choose the good. So, these three powerful motivations were her undoing, and the prospects of separation from his mate became the undoing of her husband. Eve was deceived in the transgression, but Adam was not deceived, I Tim. 2:14. He consciously chose oneness with his wife over obedience to God. I John 2:16 tells us, *“For all that is in the world, 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.”*

Therefore, regardless of the class of sin, whether of beauty, wealth, power, prestige, popularity, health and longevity, etc., they all fit into one or more of the categories John mentioned, and priority given to self, as Eve experienced in the Garden of Eden so long ago. Truly, it may be summed up as a “me, first” attitude since all three temptations are self-centered.

Is it any wonder then that the first and great commandment is: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might?”* Deut. 6:5. The second commandment is *“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”* Truly, on these two hinge all the Law, Matt. 22:37-40. How can this be? The answer is simple. These are the two commandments that successfully turn the focus of the individual away from himself, and to his Creator where it belongs. Certainly, men must earn their bread, and thus provide for their family, but where is the focus of your life? Is it on how to get ahead at any cost, or is it pleasing God and promoting your neighbor? The former is a life filled with motivations to sin!

FOR THOUGHT: Has it occurred to you that “Sin” is the misuse of anything? Why do men misuse things or people? Is it not to gain their own selfish aims regardless if those aims are considered bad or good? Think about how all wrong doing fits into the three categories of life John mentioned In 1 John 2:16, and how they fit mother Eve's temptation.

SUNDAY MORNING COMING DOWN

"Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice." Philippians 4:4.

"On a Sunday morning sidewalk, I'm wishing, Lord, that I was stoned.. 'Cause there's something in a Sunday that makes a body feel alone. And there's nothing short a' dying that's half as lonesome as the sound; Of the sleeping city sidewalk and Sunday morning coming down."

So goes the mournful lyrics of the late country singer Johnny Cash as he depicted the feelings of a worldly, sinner faced with loneliness and conviction of "Sunday morning coming down." It is a well known feeling by so many in our world today, but why?

His lyrics explain that part of it is a terrible hangover from the night before. Another part is the accompanying messy, unkempt lifestyle of dirty clothes and house. Another is the complete absence of the nightlife, and scattering to their own corners of misery those who shared those false senses of a good time. Still another is seeing the joy of a small child playing, and a father swinging his little girl; reminiscent of clean, decent good times long gone. Still another is the smell of someone frying chicken, a smell of home, but not his home. Then there was the worshipful sounds of songs coming from a nearby church, then far away a church bell ringing, all bringing back gut-wrenching memories of a good life lost somewhere in the den and noise of sin. Truly, to someone in that situation, Sunday morning in its worshipful quietness was dreaded. How different it is for an obedient child of God who so looks forward to the joy of worship and fellowship with God's wonderful people.

However, I fear there is yet another class of people dealing with Sunday morning in quite a different, but wrongful way. These are the nominal Christians who live in a breakneck world of speed, activities, and responsibilities. They see Sunday morning as a day of selfishness: to rest, recreate; to do what they could not get done in the week. Seems there is little compunction or remorse in that absence of joy about what God expects and looks for in one's manner of life. The mention of church brings conviction, but it is quickly passed off in the determination that what they want to do is right. How then will they mourn and cry when their opportunity to go to church is gone, and knowing they must soon stand face to face with their Creator? What will they hear in head and heart about "Sunday morning coming down?"

FOR THOUGHT: Why do you think Sunday morning is virtual torture to Christ rejecting men whose pleasure is physical and worldly? Do you think the evidence of religious and wholesome family activity mentioned in the lyrics of Johnny Cash's song is an appeal for spiritual cleansing?

TERMS MUST DISCRIMINATE

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." I Thessalonians 5:23.

Surely the title of this article is elementary. If terms did not precisely identify mental ideas and/or discriminately identify people, places, and things, then language would be meaningless, and civilization could not advance from what would surely be a pool of constant confusion. Even in an advanced society, the inadequacy of language, and/or the pollution of terminology continually hinders many efforts, giving rise to lawsuits in attempts to pinpoint precise ideas that weakened language produces.

It is of little surprise then that religious heresy, and many misunderstandings arise from failures to use terms of language more discriminately. In illustration of this point one need only to ask any number of people to define major doctrinal terms of the Bible such as salvation, baptism, church, etc. The degree of misunderstanding is staggering. Another such common usage error is the term "soul." It is used indiscriminately in pulpit and pew, most often to convey the idea of the spirit of man. However, the trinity of man is soul (psyche, mind life), body, and spirit. I Thess. 5:23. Precise terms for each of these are used in the scriptures. Nowhere does the Bible indicate that the soul is the spirit of man. The soul is defined as conscious life. Conscious life exists as a combination of the trinity of man, but it also exists without the body. But wherein lies any danger in failure to use these terms discriminately? Well, to use "soul" to mean "spirit" fosters powerful, erroneous ideas. For instance, both the Bible and God's people promote evangelism with the goal being the initial bringing of men to Christ, or the new birth. But the clear teaching of the scripture is that being born from above is an event affecting the spirit of man for both time and eternity. Upon that foundation one may embark on a lifetime of winning his own soul by which life is disciplined into conformity to Bible doctrine. But when "Soul" is substituted for "Spirit," the idea is inferred that the soul is complete in its salvation at the point of the new birth. Is it any wonder then that non-bible reading Christians easily sleep in fundamental error fostered by indiscriminate terminology? Moreover, that will cost them dearly, and forever at the judgment seat of Christ.

It must be understood that salvation for mankind is threefold. The spirit of man is saved and sealed in repentance of sin, and placement of trust in Christ Jesus as one's personal Savior. The mind-life (soul, consciousness) is being saved progressively as one disciplines him/herself in conformity to God's Word. Physical salvation will not come until the resurrection or rapture. Until then, it behooves all men to be discriminatory in the use of terminology lest destructive ideas find root and blossom into a successful undermining of one's faith, or worse, into full blown heresy, affecting great numbers of people.

FOR THOUGHT: As a creature in the image of God, have you identified your likeness to Him as a mental entity (Father), a physical expression (like the Son), and an invisible, but very real spirit (like the Holy Spirit)? If sin affect all three aspects of your being, and it does, then all three aspects must be saved, but when are they saved? How do you understand the statement: I am saved; I am being saved; and I shall be saved?

THE “ITCH AND SWELLING” SYNDROME

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;” 2 Timothy 4:3.

If ever the Lord’s churches lived in an “Itch and Swelling” environment spiritually, it is now! The problem? How shall this itch be scratched and/or the swelling be dealt with?

It is lamentable that churches have lost, and continue to lose influence in their communities. There are desperate attempts to reverse the trend, but to little, or most often no avail. To appreciate this, let me inject personal experience of many years.

Ministers my age knew the joy of great revival meetings, both as children growing up, and as young ministers in high demand to break the bread of life. However, those times and environment are largely past. Few churches have revival meetings anymore. Those who do most often wind up with a meeting rather than a revival. Then enters the fleshly determination to reverse the trend. Larger churches cannot stand the thought of growing smaller, so they scour the countryside for the most eloquent clown to tickle the congregation in hopes of igniting a spark of personal outreach. If that fails, at least they have heard a speaker of great, eloquent humor, and a good time was had by all.

What a difference might be made if church leadership would cease running spiritual interference, and fervently pray for God to have His way, then be content with the way God has for the church. Has it been totally disregarded that God can use a small, dedicated, knowledgeable flock more readily than a large, mostly spiritually ignorant group that runs at the slightest scare tactic Satan throws? (He will throw them).

Let me illustrate: A few years ago, Dr. Morris L. Cloud visited our church on Sunday night, which he did often. He brought family members with him, too. It was a time of attendance downturn, and I felt obliged to apologize saying, “There will not be a lot of people here tonight.” Brother Cloud looked me in the eye and said, “Brother Dillard, has it ever occurred to you that I did not come here to see a crowd?” In our Bible discussion format in evening services, he wanted to feed and to be fed. It happened, and there was considerable rejoicing!

There is a story of a starving man who happened upon a Baptist potluck, but before he could be helped by the long line of casseroles, he died. It was a simple case of his tongue beating him to death in anticipation of being smothered by the food. He could be symbolic of some church folks today who are dying from the “Itch and Swell” Syndrome in the very face of God’s table of abundant, spiritual food.

Let those who claim the name of Christ, open His storehouse and feed on that which sustains both in times of feast and famine, of itching and swelling, and of peace that passes understanding when entire churches are troubled with anxiety.

FOR THOUGHT: Have modern day disciples forgotten that Jesus said, “Let not your heart be troubled: you believe in God, believe also in me.” Do you, dear reader, know and appreciate the difference between a congregation God has built, and in which He rules, and one that is planted and driven by the aspirations of men?

THE AGE OF PHARMACY

The modern term “pharmacy” comes to us from the ancient Greek language from which it has been transliterated (taken bodily from one language to another). In Greek, it appears as “Pharmakeia.” It means the dispensing and use of drugs, but mainly in a bad sense. In both Old and New Testaments, this term, and its Hebrew equivalent “kashaph” are translated in English as “witchcraft(s) and sorcery.” It is interesting to note that this plays a major role in the lives of men as the age comes to a close. This idea is not to be taken as an accusation of evil toward legitimate pharmacies whose purpose is to aid in the treatment of the ills and pains of men in their physical infirmities. But it denotes the ages-long abuse and misuse of drugs in what is called recreational, and mind altering abuse as it predominates as a major problem in modern times.

Moreover, the Biblical terms “witchcraft and sorcery” have definite metaphorical denotations in usage throughout human history. Sometimes a drug is a physical substance. Sometimes it is a strong line of falsehoods meant to alter the thinking from that which is ultimately true, especially the Word of God. In ancient times the practitioners of idolatry employed both. They used physical drugs as they knew them, but the aim and purpose was to captivate and alter the minds of men with forms of doctrine and ceremonies that originated in hell itself. Why did this happen, and why does it continue to happen? It is as old as good and evil, God vs Satan. It is Satan’s design and purpose to destroy the very images of Almighty God as much as possible. He is the destroyer, and that must not be forgotten.

The apostle Paul named “Pharmakeia”(translated “witchcraft”) as a work of the sinful flesh in Galatians 5:20. Additionally, as false religious systems of the world, termed metaphorically as Babylon, are destroyed, their just and righteous charge among several other things is the practice and dissemination of sorceries (Pharmakeia). Revelation 18:23. It is by these things that false religion has been drunken with the blood of God’s people from the death of righteous Abel, to the prophets, and to New Testament times. Presently, the explosion of “Pharmakeia” both in literal and metaphorical senses are bringing about the destruction of this nation, and the world at large. It is imperative then to the wellbeing of every person to have a firsthand, knowledgeable standing place, namely upon the Word of God alone. If it is deemed wise to avoid the literal “Pharmakeia,” it is many times more wise to avoid the metaphorical “Pharmakeia.” The inerrant, infallible Word of God, and not the word of religious men, offers the only alternative. How dare anyone to let the Bible collect dust in their homes and hearts.

Let those with ears to hear, hear the admonition to abandon the drunken course of this world and its influence. God offers to all sobriety, but those in “pharmakeia” will meet the sure judgment already set forth in the clear terms of the Holy, Eternal Word.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you think this is the age of Aquarius or the age of “Pharmakeia?” Do you understand that widespread use of illicit drugs, and erroneous use and presentation of God’s Word have a common goal to turn the minds of people away for God and the truth of life that brings peace to the soul?

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The battle of Jericho was the very first for Israel upon entering the Promised Land. The story is intriguing -- how God caused the mighty walls to fall down flat before His people. Then it was hand to hand combat, and the otherwise most capable warriors of Jericho were no match for Israel because God was with them. In the course of the battle, Achan spotted a wedge of gold and a goodly Babylonian garment, perhaps in one of the shops of Jericho. He wanted it and he took it. But is that not what conquering armies have always done? What did he do that was so wrong?

Achan directly transgressed the command of God. He commanded that they were not to take anything of the city for spoil. Had God not so commanded, there would have been nothing particularly wrong with his actions. But God did command and Achan directly disobeyed. Was there a reason God so commanded on this occasion? Yes, but that is another story. It is enough that God commanded, even if there were no apparent reason.

Achan knew he had done wrong. He dug a hole within his tent, and buried the booty there. But what he had hidden from man, he had utterly failed to hide from God. Great and innocent men in Israel died in the next battle because of Achan's sin. Then when inquiry was made and Achan admitted his wrong, both he and his family and all their belongings were destroyed. Is this over reaction? Is this unduly harsh? It is the judgment of God, and exactly as it should have been.

Similarly, we must know from these, and other Old Testament examples that we cannot disobey God and get by with it. Even if it seems there will be no consequence, there certainly will be, and it will be harsh. Achan lost his life. He caused others to lose their life. And so it still is. If we disobey God we may well wind up at the judgment seat of Christ as those with nothing redeemable in their life. They shall be saved, yet so as by fire. And what will happen to those whom we influence in the wrong ways? The possibilities are simply awful.

Since each of us has the base potential of sinning in a similar manner as did Achan, let each one learn the high importance of agreeing with God, and doing His will in life. It makes for peace and joy here as well as hereafter.

In the final analysis, what may seem small to sinful men becomes gigantic when opposed to the righteousness of God. Think about what the first parents did. Think about what you have done, and rejoice in the abundant grace of our loving, Heavenly Father, grace that is greater than all our sin!

FOR THOUGHT: Has yielding to temptation played havoc with your testimony as a disciple of Christ? Have you, like Peter and others, repented and found sweet forgiveness and restoration? If so that is so right! Do you see that the consequence of yielding to sin brings fruit that is deplorable and simply awful?

THE BAPTISM OF JOHN, AND THE EVOLUTION OF RELIGION

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.” Matthew 13:24-30.

That there would be many look alike churches in the latter part of the church age of grace is underscored in Holy Writ. The parable of the wheat and tares is one prime example. Matt. 13:25-30. Another is the emphasized work of Satan and his ministers in 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

The great counterfeiter has done his work as well as it could possibly be done. He laid the groundwork early, drawing away formerly persecuted churches of the Lord to marry the Roman Empire, creating the Roman Catholic, and Greek Orthodox churches. From their corruption came its daughters, the Protestant churches. Additionally, the freedom of American democracy has given rise to multi-brand Neo-Protestant churches. All of these are a mimicking of the Lord's New Testament church which has sailed the bloody seas of persecution, and labored hard to maintain its separation and identity in the sweeping forces of ecumenism and its basic universal, invisible church heresy so appealing to the carnal mind of fleshly folks. Yes sir, Christianity as a religion has experienced a lot of evolution to be where it is today.

So, what does all this have to do with the baptism administered by John the Baptist? Much! In the fullness of time, and in the midst of a religious world gone astray, the Bible declares, *“There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.”* John 1:6. When asked to clarify his identity and work to the Jews, he said, *“ . . . Make straight the way of the Lord. . . ”* And, many other important statements are made about him and his ministry in John 1. John's baptism is heaven's authorized baptism. Jesus traveled many miles to be baptized of John, and it was the baptism of John that the Lord Jesus used in His church. Moreover, he conferred heaven's authority on His church to continue to administer the baptism of John upon such as brought forth fruits meet for repentance. Matthew 28:18-20.

It is by John's baptism predicated upon repentance from sin that opens the door of membership in the Lord's New Testament Church. It is the Spirit of God abiding in and teaching the church that illuminates the mind to the blessedness and importance of the core doctrines of salvation by grace alone, eternal security of the believer, deep water baptism, the local concept of the church, etc. Tare churches cannot understand nor receive this by which the perpetuation of true New Testament churches continues, and John's baptism continues. All else is nothing more than getting wet, and offers no progress to doctrinal understanding of Holy Writ, nor continuation of the blessed Bride of Christ as it prepares to rule and reign with Him in the age that is about to happen.

FOR THOUGHT: Churches that have no link to apostolic succession are devoid of the baptism of John the Baptist which Jesus placed in His church. Do you think this has anything to

do with their inability to understand and hold fast to the core doctrines of the faith once delivered to the saints? If they do not do so because they cannot do so, will they be excused on judgment day and allowed to rule and reign with Christ in the millennial reign? If so, on what basis? Do you agree the reasoning of man is invalid in these things, and only the plain teaching of the scriptures will be sufficient for judgment.

THE BIBLE: FINISHED OR OPEN ENDED?

The Bible: that most holy sixty-six books revered by the greater part of the Christian world, continues to be the final authority in matters of faith and practice. On second thought, is that really so? Most probably, the answer depends on the one to whom the question is posed, but even among those answering in the affirmative, there continues to be questions. Think about what I mean!

Powerful words are used to introduce Holy Writ, words such as "Plenary, complete," "Verbally inspired," etc. Such adjectives mean to convey that the Bible is fully complete as the word for word Holy Spirit breathed inspiration upon the 40 or so human scribes who penned it.

Still, there are those in growing numbers who affirm that God intended interpretation and direction should change as necessary to attract people to His cross and to His church. So what is the problem with that? Is the word of God imprisoned by verbiage assigned to antiquity seeing that even the last of the 66 books was completed nearly two thousand years ago?

The answer is "Yes," and that is not hard to explain. Men are sinners, and their best thoughts do not conform to the non-contradictory Word of God. The Biblical word for human attempts to alter the Word is "Iniquity."

Paul looked forward to the completion of the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) as he put it in I Cor:13:13. Then James labeled it the perfect (complete) law of liberty, James 1:25. Furthermore, very harsh and specific judgment is already pronounced on those who would alter God's book, Rev.22:19.

The same humanistic mindset is also hard at work on the United States Constitution, and it continues to be a national debate. Is the document to be interpreted strictly as written, or should it be interpreted in line with modern whims of a sinful society which have worsened in the last 200 years?

The wisdom of our forefathers is indeed a marvel. Their work must not be undermined. But the wisdom of God Who gave us the Bible is greater, far greater, and it must not be undermined. Both documents, though unequal, must be accepted as finished, not open-ended or subject to alteration by the whims of godless men.

FOR THOUGHT: If the Bible is not to be followed as originally written, why should it be followed at all? Do you see that to change any teaching of the Bible puts sinful men in control instead of the righteous God Who gave it to us? What is the rule of faith and practice in your life?

THE CHURCH THAT LIVED IN SATAN'S SEAT OF POWER

"And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;" Rev. 2:12.

Twice, our Lord made mention that the church at Pergamos lived where Satan's seat was, Rev. 2:13. That in itself made the message most interesting. It was my privilege to visit this place several years ago. What I saw is burned into my memory for as long as I have one. Just what was the power of Pergamos. Think with me!

The city was characterized by politics, religion, industry, and health services. Located in western Turkey not far inland from the Aegean Sea, two rivers ran near the city, and one of the most complete libraries of the ancient world containing over 200,000 volumes was there.

The word "Pergamos," according to some linguists, means a high walled city, which Pergamos certainly had. It hosted a great walled citadel, with magnificent idol temples, and one of the steepest amphitheaters in the world. From this mountain part of the city one can see for miles in any direction, allowing ample warning of any approaching enemy. Others think the name comes from the Greek word for marriage with an intensive prefix meaning "thoroughly married," as in full submission to the forces of the world (Satan).

The political winds of Pergamos were largely passive. They had pursuits of life more important to them than politics, especially on the international scene. So, whether Greeks, Romans, or whoever was in power, they acquiesced to them to continue their pursuits. Thus, it became a significant city to all. They were a city of much idol worship with temples rivaling those of Ephesus. They were also the first city to be known as a city of emperor worship, having a temple to Augustus Caesar.

In industry, they were the first producers of parchment. The very word "parchment" came from "Pergamos." In health services, they were worshippers of the mythological god "Asklepios." It was symbolized as twin or two-headed snakes, a symbol that remains with the medical community. They were into Psychiatry, and became a sort of hospital city. Roman soldiers suffering depression were sent there with a full year of leave to heal. Once there, they enjoyed entertainment in the city's two amphitheaters. bathed in the natural hot springs, and spent some time at night walking through great underground tunnels while required to shout constantly whatever was on their mind. "Psychiatrists" would listen in at strategic points and formulate a plan of therapy for them. If they were not well in a year, Rome would have the soldiers executed. It was quite an incentive to heal.

The church at Pergamos witnessed, was persecuted, and yielded up several martyrs, resisting the doctrine of Balaam, and actions of Nicolaitanism which the Lord said He hates. It sounds a lot like today. May God help us to do as well or better than this ancient church did. Satan's seat did not die with ancient Pergamos.

FOR THOUGHT: The triumphs and tragedies of the church at Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17) live as instructions for the Lord's church in every generation of the age. What do you see in pergamos that should be emulated today? What do you see in those ais verses of scripture that should serve as a stern warning for churches today?

THE DANGERS OF ASSUMPTION

“ . . . for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” 2 Timothy 1:12.

Several decades ago, as a young, inexperienced traveler, a visit to foreign mission fields underscored dangers in assuming the schedules of others to be dependable. The trip to Costa Rica included a stop in Mexico City. It was a blessed time which demands a story within itself. But the point is that the time for departure from Mexico City was assumed to be dependable as printed. An early arrival at the airport allowed some leisure time, and then an early check-in put me directly on the airplane. As I was being seated, the plane started to move. I exclaimed, “but this plane is not scheduled to leave for another 30 minutes. The stewardess's reply was, “It is O.K. everyone is here so let's go!” Huh! I was glad to be on the plane early.

Later, when departing San Jose, Missionary Ward was also traveling back to the States, so we went together. At the airport, we were told all seats were taken, and I was not included. Under protest that I had an international ticket that scheduled my travel on this flight, I was told a 24 hour early check-in was required. So, it appeared that I would be left behind, awaiting another flight, perhaps the next day. I had assumed that my placement was secured by the scheduling of others.

Fortunately, Gene Ray Ward intervened on my behalf, and not knowing Spanish, I do not know for sure just what all went on, but because of his intervention, I was allowed to travel on that flight by using a stewardess jump-seat. I was, and am, grateful for the help, and those incidents made me a much wiser traveler. It truly is dangerous to assume.

That danger is greatly underscored in the world of spiritual things. So many guilty of assuming that others are right will face a rude and disastrous awakening when they find out that baptism, church membership, good works, and their dependence on the misinformation of others have not saved them. Paul said, *“I know Whom I have believed...”* Personal relationship with Christ Jesus cannot be replaced, or substituted in any way. Assumptions may be worked around in mundane things, but not in the eternal welfare of the soul!

FOR THOUGHT: Can you think of any other area of life in which there is more assumption than religion? Who would want to go to hell or for that matter, lose the reward of life for eternity because they trusted someone who was blind? Are you exercising faith in a man, a church, a denomination, or in the eternal Word of the Creator God?

THE DEVIL'S DISTRIBUTION OF DECEPTION

The influence of God in the world of men has been consistently counter to their depraved propensity. Consider the global propensity of men in the antediluvian world when they were left largely to themselves. It was a disaster. Then consider the second global ecumenical movement at the Tower of Babel. God interfered there, and instituted barriers to prevent replication of a similar movement.

But egotistical sin in men drives them ever onward toward some undefinable goal of utopian finality by which they are the creators of their own glorious destiny apart from any notion of God. It is allowed by the extended grace of God, but men will bring the species to the unspeakable quagmire of slaughter in Armageddon, and opine, "How can this be?"

Denying the existence and influence of God is also denying that of the devil. Men forget willingly that he is the god of this present, evil world system.

The cunning patience of Satan working in the cosmos of sin and death allows for just the right environment to set the stage for the final act of the age. That environment is mentioned in Revelation 16:13-14, *"And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, for they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to battle of that great day of God Almighty."*

So, the unified, unclean spirits like frogs emanate from the mouth of the dragon (Satan), the beast, (government), and the false prophet (religion).

It is offered that these unified unclean spirits with their unified message and influence amounts to nothing more than the deception of people who have rejected God and His eternal truth. They will lead men to create the third and final, global, ecumenical movement, glorying that they overcame every barrier God placed in the cosmos at the tower of Babel: race, geographical boundaries, language, and last, but not least, the truth.

The unclean spirits are strong, persuasive, and will accomplish their task. Those who know truth may rejoice as this heralds the soon appearance of Christ Jesus, but it brings great mourning and grief over the blindness of men. Many who call themselves churches of our Lord are not immune from these spirits, but will advance their cause. It is so important that God's people spend more time in THE BOOK!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you know that charlatan religionists spend much more time studying the term of your faith than you do? They become masters of deceit by using terms you know, but with different meanings attached. Do you agree that one can best identify error by knowing the tenets of truth? Does this underscore the need for much study to The Book of Truth, the Bible?

THE ESSENCE OF FAITH

Embraced by millions over the vicissitudes of time, but understood by none, the life-altering, heaven connection of faith, abounds greater than the sum of all the ugliness, hideous, and condemning factors of sin in a largely God-rejecting world. Just think about it!

Hebrews 11:1 calls this spiritual avenue, “. . . *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” The blessedness, power, and essence of faith follows throughout that tremendous chapter as the responsible agent of triumph over the overwhelming agents of sin and death. It is arguably the greatest chapter of Christian sustainment in the Bible.

Faith, hope, and love are a triad of very real intangibles which defy the test tubes and microscopes of science, and also the understanding of those who are the recipients of them. They are the provisions of grace: the Creator to the created that rectifies, even excels the Edenic cosmos that our federal parents cast down so long ago.

It all has to do with the decision making processes. Adam and Eve decided to transgress the commands of the Creator thus adding sin inexorably to the makeup of the species.

Paul argues in I Corinthians chapter fifteen, that as the decision of Adam brought condemnation, the decision and perfect work of Jesus brings light and life; albeit not to the species, but by every individual who is exercised thereby. The greatest wonder of it all is its possibility. It took the death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus to do it. But death is the direct result of sin, and Jesus had no sin—no not one. How then could the sinless become sin for us, and pay the penalty for sin that we could not? Again, it is the decision making process, and specifically of one Who is qualified to make the decision with the wherewithal to pay the uttermost.

Thus are we blessed with the substantiating of eternal things. That substantiation creates the intangible reality of hope in the human heart. Hope is the earnest, intense expectation of knowing and experiencing the physical realities so intangibly planted. It is by faith that we understand creation, Heb. 11:3. So, the essence is reserved in faith: without it, it is impossible to please God for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. Heb. 11:6. Truly, a faithless life is a life that would be better served had it never existed.

FOR THOUGHT: What do you think to be the difference between faith and a wish? How deeply into the psyche do you think decisions must reach to allow entrance into, or the acquisition of faith? Does mental acquiescence qualify as faith? Why? Why not?

THE GRASS WAS NOT GREENER, BUT DANGEROUS

As a small boy in the coal strip-mining country of south Sebastian County, Arkansas, our family had a wonderful Jersey cow. Sometimes, ole Jersey would find a way out of the pasture to get at the greener grass beyond. One evening, milking time came but there was no Jersey, Upon calling, a faint cattle cry could be heard in the woods beyond the pasture, Ole Jersey had fallen into an experimental mining hole that was filled with water, but the shaft, though deep, was small enough to wedge her body, She struggled but could not get out, Neighbor men were summoned to help, they had to cut enough trees to construct a triangle hoist support. Then with rope and belting straps placed beneath her body, they were able to lift the cow, and swing her enough to get her feet on solid ground. However her weakened condition necessitated four men to support her with two long poles beneath her body, walking her back to the barn. Her rescue was a joy and the talk of the community for some time.

How many times are God's people guilty of Ole Jersey's greener grass allurements! When pastors get tired of studying, they may prefer to change churches where old sermons can be repeated instead of knuckling down to study to build newer and more needful ones. Besides, the grass looks greener over there. Church members who do not always get their way, or feel that nothing exciting is happening in their church will "church hop" because the grass always looks greener over there. Godly people will sometimes yield to the allurements of financial gain that requires them to move away from the fellowship of any church because more money always makes the grass look greener. Jesus admonished His disciples to judge righteous judgment, not the kind that is predominant in the world. A move away from the fellowship of God's people is a bad move unless you are a missionary with a specific purpose of winning people and helping to constitute a New Testament church. Think about it, and remember Old Jersey! Indeed, the grass always seems greener on the other side of the fence, but once there it has a way of turning dirty brown or sometimes even dangerous. One does well to revisit the admonition of Paul to the church at Corinth, "*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*" I Corinthians 15:58.

FOR THOUGHT: If a church is a scriptural, New Testament church, it matters not if it is large or small. The same God must be the object of worship, and the Holy Spirit must be the director. God gets glory in ways sometimes foreign to men's thinking. How do you feel about your church? Is the grass greener somewhere else? Do you think men often seek to please themselves rather than search for, and determine, the Will of God for their life?

THE LIKENESS OF THIS GENERATION

Someone once said, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." It appears contradictory, nevertheless it is true. Vaunted progress in most every field of endeavor characterizes the present time, but the universal plight, and the persistent actions of men remain unchanged. Nowadays, good is called evil and evil is called good. Selfishness largely rules, and the unchanging principles of time and eternity are pushed aside for what men want right now.

It was to a similar generation of Jesus' day that he explained the ministry of John the Baptist, and the subsequent kingdom of heaven. There were those who heard him, and they with the publicans justified God being baptized with the baptism of John. On the other hand, there were many of the lawyers and Pharisees who rejected the counsel of God against themselves by rejecting the baptism of John. Luke 7.

They wanted to pit the ministry of John against the ministry of Jesus. They criticized the person of John as being aloft, stoic, and antisocial because he was not given to eating bread, nor drinking wine with them. Then they criticized Jesus because He did those things, calling Him a gluttonous man, a winebibber, and a friend of publicans and sinners. In short, nothing could be right in the eyes of these critics but their own twisted formula of life. How that remains. Times have changed, but the more they change, the more they stay the same.

Jesus summarized the generation of His earthly ministry. *"They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you and you have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept."* Luke 7:31-32. This is an unchanged status quo, having multiplied exponentially.

Men do not have the qualifications, nor any ability to call upon the substance or perimeters of eternity. God does! Moreover, the true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ are in covenant relationship with Him, so they have been given the knowledge of eternity by the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. They have visited that dimension vicariously, and proven their understanding by the eternal, unchanging Word. It is they who justify God, not only being baptized with the baptism of John, but offering the same to such as will bring forth fruit meet for repentance. With them, by God's grace, I stand! Trusting one's pompous, but powerless formulations is silly. Trusting the eternal creator of the universe is wise.

FOR THOUGHT: The challenge of every person is to come out from their generation of the world and be separated unto God. How do you view your generation? Do you cast your lot with it, or do you prefer to cast your lot with the Christ of the Word? What steps can you take, or have you taken to make your choice a reality?

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY

A songwriter once penned these words: "Troublesome times are here, filling men's hearts with fear; freedoms we all hold dear now are at stake . . ." When one looks at the political arena, it appears little above mass confusion. When one looks at the religious scene it is void of most of the Bible teachings. When one looks at the economic stage, it is so tenuous as to cause men's hearts to fail. If all this seems to paint a bleak picture of today's world, it is meant to do so. But there is more, much more!

The crumbling foundation of the family unit leaves children without parents, or in some cases single parents. Then the demands of the workplace leave little time for children who are largely abandoned to a latchkey position to formulate their own distorted views of life. Each ensuing generation is in an ever worsening condition. People ask, "What is it all about. What is happening to the world we live in?"

Certainly, these are times so often prophesied by God's Word. It would seem a time for the masses to hear the clarion call of the gospel. It should be a time of widespread repentance, of men seeking the will of the Lord with a contrite heart. But just the opposite is the mainstream of life. What is one to make of it all?

The apostle Paul informed us of these times. He wrote in 2 Thessalonians 2:7, *"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let until he be taken out of the way."* Think about it!

The "Mystery of Iniquity." The term "Mystery" is from the ancient Greek term, "Musterion." It derives its existence from a base word "Muo" which basically means "To shut the mouth." Hence, a mystery is something known to the initiated, but unknown to the uninitiated. It remains a mystery to those unqualified and unwilling to search out and know the meaning. "Iniquity" is a translation of the Greek word "Law" (nomous) with a negative prefix, to literally translate "no law." It means not given to or ruled by law; contempt and violation of law, wickedness. This is aptly descriptive of modern times, but they will worsen because there is a restraining power who lets (restrains) until he be taken out of the way, so that ultimate chaos may prevail.

The so-called progress of humanity apart from God has led to the abolition of world war; the vaunted progress of medical science has led to longer life spans, and as the world struggles to balance trade, unite religious movements, and to feed the bulging population creating population shifts of illegal migration, the world ripens for the ultimate rule of its god. His predetermined end of it all is destruction in many forms, but the final stage will be Armageddon. It is a millennia long plan that will go down in eternal defeat for all evil. Sweet in the mouth, but bitter in the stomach.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe the world today is populated by folks who largely disdain law because it gets in the way of what they want to do? If civil law is so viewed, what about spiritual law? Do you think religious people violate God's laws to engage in religious activity that pleases them instead of God? If so, do you see the mystery of iniquity at work?

THE PRIMACY OF LANGUAGE

It has been said that if one knew and understood every word of every language, he would then possess the sum of all the knowledge of men. Although there is such a thing as experiential knowledge, it mostly affirms the validity of the knowledge base. So, what is this thing about the primacy of language? Think with me for a moment!

The apostle John begins his writing of the gospel with what appears to be a simple statement, yet it is profoundly beyond the apprehension of mortal minds. *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made."* Later in chapter one he tells us that *"The Word was made flesh...."* No one doubts that this is a direct reference to Jesus.

What is underscored is the initial time, place, and status. It was the Word. This is "Logos" in the Greek language. The same word is used repeatedly in reference to the common utterances of men. The idea of a word is undergirded by the necessity of a mental concept. From the concept a unique word is formulated by which that concept may be conveyed from one mental entity to another. This process, restricted to a single concept, and a single word to convey it is utterly profound. Consider then that the unfathomable intellect of God created multiple languages in an instant of time at the tower of Babel.

John's introduction of the Word draws from, and is enhanced by, the initial introduction to deity in Genesis 1:1. The Hebrew word for God is "Elohim." That term specifically denotes not only the intellect of concept, and the production of terminology to convey it, but also the innate power to make the meaning of the words (concept) to become physical reality instantly. Such is the vastness of the divine intellect that is described in comparison to that of man as the difference in distance from heaven to earth. Isaiah 55:9.

But God in His inexplicably vastness of mercy and grace gave to us the Word, and the Word carried out the concept of redemption for an otherwise hopelessly fallen race. Additionally, He has committed to us the Word with which to permeate the world of men. There are many concepts out there, but the ends of them are the ways of death.

FOR THOUGHT: What concepts are you conveying to others? They are conveyed through the primacy of language. What are your words? What are the ultimate ends of your words? Death, or life? Jesus is The Word, and the words He spoke are light and life!

THE REMAINS OF ANTIQUITY TESTIFY (Philippi)

"And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them."
ACTS 16:10.

The ship left the port of Athens at night. Calm seas allowed land lovers to have a peaceful sleep. Next morning, a cold front brought rain showers and rougher seas, allowing some to experience sea sickness, but calmness soon re-appeared, and following a delicious breakfast, the ship docked in Kavala, a thriving city biblically noted as Neopolis. With sack lunches in hand, a tour bus began the fairly short inland trip to the ancient city of Philippi. Along the mountain road one could view below the ancient Roman highway made of cobblestone, and wide enough for one automobile. Here Roman soldiers of old marched four abreast, and chariots were driven to this ancient Roman colony outpost.

The ruins of Philippi are situated at the base of a mountain into the side of which was constructed an amphitheater, attesting to the many civic gatherings and entertainment events its citizens enjoyed. The city ruins constitute approximately three blocks in width and three or four blocks long. Surely, one would find some evidence of the apostle Paul's visit to this place. They were there.

There was a large open area around which were the remnants of shops and municipal buildings. This would be the place where the demon-possessed woman harassed the apostle until he drove it from her. Also, there was on the western outskirts of the town a small, swift stream still flowing freely. It was deep in places, and in some areas narrow enough that an athletic person could jump across it. This is the stream where some of the ancients gathered to pray, and Paul preached here and won and baptized Lydia, a seller of purple from Thyatira. Ruins of the prison at Philippi still stand. The cubical cells of thick rock construction gave vision of Paul and Silas singing and praising God in the dead of night with wounds on their backs still smarting severely from the lashes of the whip laid on them. They had deprived men of the city their fundraising opportunities by the demon possessed woman who no longer could serve them as before. It was here that God sent an earthquake, loosed the prisoner's bands, and brought the jailor to his knees, and Christ Jesus into his heart.

At one end of the excavation ruins of a church house remains, dating back to the third century. A wall, marble flooring, and a deep water baptistry constructed in the form of a cross all testified to the influence of Paul, Silas, the jailor and his house, and so many others that led to its construction and use. The marvelous book of Philippians, the book of emphasized joy, testifies of the worship that ensued for decades or more.

FOR THOUGHT: Paul and Silas were denied the opportunity to preach in Bithynia, and Philippi was their first evangelistic campaign in Macedonia. Do you see the ways that God used them in that city? Can you name two or three significant accomplishments?

THE REPROACH OF A PICKED TREE

The orchard owner looks with great expectation at the trees under his care. He nourishes, protects, and defends the trees from pestilence and anything else that would prevent full fruition. He is happy with the many blossoms, small buds, and developing fruit. Harvest time is truly filled with great anticipation, but once harvest is over, then what? The tree is still valuable, but it has given all that it can give. There will be no more fruit to glean, and the eye of anticipation no longer sees as it did before. It is a tree, now ordinary and fruitless, having given all. It is interesting to note that this idea is presented in the Word with reference to our Lord and Savior.

In Psalm 22, which is prophetic of the life and sacrifice of Jesus, the word used to describe Him in verse six is "reproach." The verse states, *"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people."* The word "worm" here is the "tolah" worm that was crushed to yield the blood used to dye fabrics with the color of royalty. The term "reproach" is a translation of the Hebrew word "Charaph," which conveys the idea of a picked tree with nothing more to give. That term used here of Jesus describes how many people see Him as He has given all for the harvest of the souls of men. The people expected that the miracles He invoked for others would surely be invoked for Himself thus giving them a super personage in which to glory in the flesh. Those who so hoped were sadly disappointed.

However, the crushing of the "tolah" worm, wrought robes of righteousness for the royal children of the King, and those who avail themselves of the fruit yielded by that tree find eternal, spiritual sustenance, and a white robe of royal righteousness in which to stand before the Creator.

So, how do you see Him dear reader? Is He a disappointment, or a wellspring of eternal joy? Is He a picked tree to be turned away from, or is He the Living Tree of Life with the fruit of eternal righteousness to all who receive Him in repentance and faith? My prayer is that you see Him as the latter, even the bread of life that one may eat and not hunger again; as the fruit of all righteousness that one may receive and have not sin imputed by the heavenly Father. There He is, the TREE at the crossroads of time of everyone.

FOR THOUGHT: In Eden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was noted as pleasant to look upon, good for food, and desirable to make one wise. Have you ever noticed that the Tree of Life, also in the garden, had no such physical appeals to it? What do you think is wrong with Christians who Jesus, His Word, and worship as "Old hat, routine stuff?" Is Jesus a "Picked tree" to them? What is He to you?

THE RETURN OF JESUS: EMINENT, IMMINENT, OR IMMANENT?

Folks who would be teachers of eschatology would do well to understand the homophones of English to convey correct theology. Let's think for a minute!

"Eminent," "Imminent," and "Immanent," are three English words that sound the same (homophones) in pronunciation, but their meaning is different. Using the wrong term then when transferring the spoken language to written form can easily convey the wrong message.

According to linguistic experts, "Eminent" means "Outstanding," "Honorable," as a prominent author, inventor, teacher, etc. Next, the term "Imminent" means "about to happen immediately," as if you light a firecracker and stick it in your britches, a catastrophe is imminent." On the other hand, "Immanent" means "Pervasive," "embedded," "Always associated with."

Mercenary authors capitalize on the word "Imminent" in reference to the return of Jesus to institute the millennial reign. The flooded market with such writings just a few years ago seemed to excite nominal Christians for a short time, and it succeeded in enriching the authors, who seemed to be little concerned about the correctness of Biblical theology. So which of these words are best in describing the Savior's return?

Truly Jesus is the Eminent Creator, God, Savior, Coming King, but the idea is not to describe the person of the altogether lovely Lord and Savior, but the event of His return to earth. "Imminent," the word chosen by mercenary authors was soundly refuted by the Apostle Paul to the church at Thessalonica; hence, to all churches throughout the age. His instructions about the coming of Christ, and the gathering of Christians to Him are, *"That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?"* 2 Thess. 2: 3-5. It is true that no one knows exactly when Jesus will return, but if it were today as some would have you believe, then much that the Bible warns us to look for that has not come about would make those instructions moot.

So, that leaves the term "Immanent" as the best adjective in reference to the return of Christ. Truly, the idea of His return is pervasive in the gospel, in the heart of doctrine, and in the hope of prophecy.

It is obvious that this age is drawing to a close: His coming is near. Then let the pervasiveness of "Immanent" be the description of our life and hope in Him!

FOR THOUGHT: If you truly thought the sky would be rent, and the Son of God would appear on this very day, would you change anything about your life? About your faith? If you would not, then would that not portray insincerity about your profession of faith? If the return of Jesus is indeed Immanent rather than imminent should that in any way lessen the need for watchfulness for His return? Why?

THE RING OF TRUTH

Truth! It is questioned by rulers, sought after in misguided paths of philosophy, pseudo-science, and secular education, obscured by false religion, servants of mammon, and demonic powers, but truth survives unscathed. It not only survives, it reigns supreme in the intellects of the universe, and shall evermore, and It has a ring to it!

Jesus said, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me."* John 10:27. In this great Shepherd/sheep chapter, the sound of voice is underscored as the identifying factor of the true Shepherd. Doubtless, there was uniqueness in the voice of Jesus by which He could be identified, more-so than the telephone voice of dear ones in modern times. However, this discourse was spoken to, and applicable to, His church throughout the age.

After Jesus' ascension, His physical voice was no longer audible to His saints, but the meaning of John 10 remains as effective as any other scriptures. His sheep hear His voice. He knows them. They follow Him. Inseparable from His voice are the meanings of words and ideas spoken, and subsequently preserved in Holy Writ.

Unlike any other, the Shepherd's voice is underscored by unity, harmony, and symmetry. But the uniqueness does not end there. The words (voice) of the Master are spirit, and they are life. John 6:63. The Shepherd's voice is the voice of God preserved in the Bible, and carried by the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit given to the sheep, by which discernment is possible. The carnal mind cannot perceive the Shepherd's voice because it is spiritual, and spiritual things are spiritually understood. 2 Cor. 2:14.

Much is said in the Bible about ears and how they hear or do not hear. Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who had ears to hear, and sternly warned all of His people throughout the age to use their ears to hear (discern) what the Spirit is saying to the churches (Rev. 2-3.)

From the Garden of Eden to this present day, other voices continuously vie for one's attention. They contain information which if followed end in eternal disaster more-so than Adam and Eve found out. So, try the spirits, listen for the Master's voice. Truth always has a biblically harmonizing ring to it

FOR THOUGHT: Master charlatans succeed due to the ignorance of the deceived. They know this and use it artfully. What do you know about Bible truth that will keep you from the clutches of religious charlatans? Do you hear discordance in their chimes? What can you do to better prepare yourself as a disciple of Jesus, and avoid the snares of charlatans?

THE ROCK

In various contexts, rocks play a sizable role in the life of country boys. As a child in the WWII era, most of our area roads were topped off with crushed rock. They were excellent in size for a slingshot instrument commonly referred to as a “Bean-flip” A handful or two in each front pocket helped to wear out jeans, but always ready ammunition to trophy a sparrow, squirrel, wasp nest, or snake. Crushed rock seldom flew true due to erratic shapes, but now and then when hitting a target was deemed highly desirable, a marble could be substituted which would unfailingly fly straight to the target.

Washed rocks were seldom used due to the difficulty of collecting them and their lack of stability. However, they were plentiful around sandbars in creek beds. I found a rock that was smooth, had a slight indentation that just fit the thumb and dubbed it “My lucky rock.” Mom would often find it in my jeans on washday and inquired about it. She must have thought it cute because it went missing one day after several months of my close protection of it. Then, it was forgotten.

Now, I am an old man. Mom died over a quarter century ago. A couple of boxes of things accrued to me that my siblings would not take. They were placed in the attic. The other day, it was time to clear the attic because of the continuing difficulty of simply getting up there. It was then that those old boxes of mom’s stuff were re-discovered and examined. Upon opening one of them I stared in disbelief. There was my lucky rock, the whole idea of which she cherished and placed it among her keepsakes. Who could have told me that a common washed creek rock would carry with it joy and a springboard into cherished memories of childhood triumphs.

It reminded me that rocks are still important, especially a private, blessed rock, which I enjoy as do many others. David said in 2 Samuel 2:22, “*The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer.*” Our rock is Christ upon whom His church is built, and who remains a fortress, high tower and rock of protection through the ages to all who trust in Him. He is that Rock that cleft for me. Then to the Rock let me fly, to the Rock that is higher than I. “Amen, and so mote it be!”

FOR THOUGHT: A rock is thought of as ammunition. What is your spiritual ammunition? A rock is thought of as protection. What is your ultimate protection? A rock is thought of as enduring. What are you trusting, depending on, to endure? If your answer to all the questions is not Jesus and His eternal Word, when do you intend to rectify your answer?

THE SALT SHAKER AND THE BIRD

Solomon said, *"Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird."* Prov. 1:17. This verse of scripture brings a childhood story so vividly to mind. It goes like this: as a very young lad, I spent a lot of time with my paternal grandfather who lived next door. (There were a couple of vegetable gardens between the houses) Grandpa observed me attempting in vain to catch a bird. He told me to take his salt shaker and sprinkle some salt on the bird's tail, and I could catch it with ease. So, I chased the bird with the salt shaker until I tired of it then declared to grandpa that the bird could see the salt shaker, besides that, if I could get close enough to sprinkle salt on his tail, I could catch it without the salt shaker. He smiled a really big, approving smile! I learned that some things are unerringly true in spite of what may appear as true on the unthoughtful surface. To impart such wisdom and instruction that looks far beyond the surface of things was the burden of King Solomon as he penned the awesome book of Proverbs.

The young and inexperienced are taught to be wary of the ways of pseudo-friends whose purpose is to deceive and to destroy. Those who entice others to do evil are not friends at all, but extremely selfish fiends who could care less for the well-being of those whom they entice. Such is the deceitfulness of Satan and his emissaries. The Apostle Paul exposes those whose purpose it is to deceive and destroy in the spiritual realm in 2 Cor. 11:13-15, *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works."*

The salt shaker and the bird is a great lesson for the very young, but greater and more important lessons of the spiritual nature remain underscored for all in the age of accountability. If men could achieve righteousness on their own, Christ died in vain. But they cannot. Now just how plainly do you understand God's Word vs man's sinful way? *"Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird!"*

FOR THOUGHT: Has it occurred to you that Satan's biggest business is deceit through religion? Could you expect any less from the supernatural counterfeiter? Chasing religious promises based on the various teachings of man is vain and exhausting. On the other hand God promises rest for his knowledgeable disciples. What are you following?

THE TRUTH ABOUT CHURCH PERPETUITY

New Testament churches are the legitimate successors of the first and only church that Jesus started during His personal ministry on earth. Jesus personally called out the first members, all of whom had the baptism of John, as did He, and set them in the church (ecclesia: called out assembly) as apostles. Furthermore, Jesus promised that church perpetuity (continuous existence until His return and beyond, Eph. 3:21; Matt. 28:20; 16:18).

Some would say that Matt. 28:20 is a reference to the apostles rather than to His church. But the promise is the continuous presence of Jesus in those activities to the very end of the age. All of those disciples who first heard this were dead within one hundred years. So church assembly is the context and perpetuity is the promise to it.

I have heard some argue that the church Jesus started did, in fact, cease to exist in the dark ages, and it is their mission to restore it. How silly! Almighty God can create. He can hold the vastness of the universe in place and purpose, but He cannot create a living organism and empower and protect it to minister continuously throughout the age? No apologies are offered for vehement disagreement to that faithless thinking. It is an outright denial of perpetuity. Moreover, one should give serious meditation to the meaning of Ephesians 3:21. This verse of scripture states, *"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."* If I understand this statement correctly, it promises that God is to receive glory in the church. It further states that this glory will come through its head, Jesus, and that it will extend far beyond this present age to all ages, world without end. Friends that is perpetuity. Furthermore, what shall be made of Matthew 16:18? The specific promise is that Jesus would continuously build (oikodomeo: dome-up) His church. It also strongly states that the gates of hell will not prevail against it. If at any time there has been even a brief time when the church that Jesus founded on the shores of the Sea of Galilee has not existed, then it follows that the gates of hell did, in fact, prevail against it. But it did not happen, nor will it ever happen. The church of our Lord Jesus Christ is perpetual in its existence.

Finally, in a nutshell, a New Testament church will be identified as having at least the following properties: It started between 30 – 33 A.D. It was started by Jesus. It was started in Palestine. It holds to the doctrines, practices, faith once delivered to it. It perpetuates itself by these things, administering the baptism of John the Baptist which Jesus placed within it to administer to professed believers. It is never invisible, and it is always a local body. It is not hidden, but will be found by those who seek it.

FOR THOUGHT: Matters of faith are not subject to the laws of physical proof. Which came first: the chicken or the egg? Of course, it was the chicken God created. If there are chickens today could there ever be a time since creation that there was not a chicken? So also, if the true church of Jesus exists today, could there ever be a time since its creation that there was not a true church on the earth? Perpetuity! It is the promise of its heavenly creator! What is the history, and what are the doctrines of your church?

THE UNCHANGING GOD

In 1847, Henry F. Lyte penned these words of a most beloved hymn “Abide With Me” that still appears in most church hymnals. One stanza reads:

“Swift to its close ebbs out life’s little day;
Earth’s joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see—
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.”

About the only thing constant about earthly life is its ever-changing, forward pressing quality. From the cradle to the grave nothing about earthly life is really static. In fact, all bodily cells are locked into a life/death struggle. They succumb, and are replaced every seven years ... until life itself is separated from the body. As a humorous aside to this fact, I like to tell folks that my wife has had eight husbands, and he has had eight wives in our 56 years of union.

Locally and nationally, things are in a state of constant change since the second law of thermodynamics continues undeterred. Still God’s people sing of an “Unclouded Day;” “Where We’ll Never Grow Old,” etc., and look longingly for that glorified state, while possessing the earnest of it. 2 Cor. 1:22.

Indeed, the Bible forthrightly declares that though the outward man perishes, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. 2 Cor. 4:16. God does not allow the saved spirit of man to change. It really is constant, fixed! How can that be? It is sealed by the great Creator God in His expression of the Holy Spirit. Eph. 4:30. But, some folks wonder how can this be true?

It is true because God never changes. *“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever.”* Heb. 13:8. *“I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”* Malachi 3:6

Change, decay, trouble, pain, death are inextricably embedded in the present cosmos, but a new cosmos is coming for those who are ready for it. It has been won, bought, and will be implemented by Christ Jesus.

GOR THOUGHT: Do you have Jesus in your heart? Is your mind being renewed, Rom. 12:2, in readiness for His soon return? Do you ever live vicariously in an incorruptible body on a brand new earth? What do you know about your own future?

THE VALLEY OF DEATH. . . OR . . . IT'S SHADOW

Leaving the gaudy lights of the sin-laden city of Las Vegas, Nev. the bucket list of things to see in California began with nearby Death Valley. A very early start assured that awesome, below sea level, desert would be behind us before the unbearable heat of the day prevailed. Early morning temps in the 90's bathed the contents of the forbidden place in coolness before the thermometer climbed to near 120 degrees.

The valley is appropriately named. Here, the challenge of life for all plants and animals is truly formidable. Travelers who enter there flippantly and without caution may keenly regret it. I remarked to our family, "I hope you noticed that we are the only ones on this highway, and have been for many miles." Still, the trip through the valley was most rewarding. The early morning sun brought out brilliant colors in the dry, nude hills. The formation of rocks, mountains, and sand dunes yielded to prepared travelers a sense of pleasant wonder, joy, and praise for its uniqueness in the handiwork of the Almighty. However, for the unprepared traveler, the valley held horrible misery and potential death in its harsh and unrelenting environment.

In its day to day testimony of nature's speech and knowledge, it portrays another Valley of Death that is universal to natural man. The Hebrew letter in the New Testament forthrightly declares, "*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.*" Heb. 9:27-28.

Readers should make no mistake about it. There is a trip through the Valley of Death, or the shadow of that valley for everyone. But those who have received the cross work of Jesus in repentance from sin, and faith in His substitutionary sacrifice for them have no fear in their heart of that journey. In fact, this is one journey Jesus made Himself for all who trust in Him. So appropriately did the Psalmist declare: "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*" Friends, there is a huge difference between entering that valley prepared as opposed to being unprepared. The difference is life or death forever. Think about it! How will you make that trip which no man may decline?

FOR THOUGHT: Death is universal, uncertain as to time, but certain for everyone. So, what journey will you take? Will it be the valley of death or the shadow of the valley of death? Faith in Christ Jesus will determine the difference? Are you saved, thus safe, in Him? When did you first trust Him with all your heart? Can you recall that experience?

THE WORD OF PURPOSE

The Holy Bible, the cannon of sixty-six books common to the King James Version is the Word of the Creator God of heaven and earth to mankind. Between its covers one finds the origin of man, his cause of condemnation, his means of salvation, as well as his trials, history, achievement of spiritual maturity, security, and hope that is both sure and steadfast. It is the prime directive of the race, and its importance eclipses all other documents combined. Despite criticisms to the contrary, it remains the basis of morals, laws, and faith which has sustained human life on the planet, and allowed governments and society at large to make meaningful progress. Where its teachings are observed, peace and progress abounds. Where its teachings are rejected misery, poverty, death and all manner of evil prevails. Truly, if only one collection of writings could be retained, and all others destroyed, this writer would not hesitate to name his collection to keep as the Holy Bible.

The Bible is not a history book, but it accurately records all one really needs to know about the history of civilization. It is not a science book. That is not its purpose, yet it is supportive of all systematized facts.

Still others say, "Well one can take it or leave it." Yes, one can take it or leave it, temporarily, but to quote Jesus, "*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth forth from the mouth of God.*" Matt. 4:4. By the Word of God every person has the grace of life, and will by it ultimately be judged. It is alive, sharper than a two-edged sword, and will survive the universal cataclysm that is coming right on schedule. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the Word of God abideth forever. I Peter 1:23. Its purpose is to give one knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to escape the damnation of sin, and to elevate its disciples ultimately to eternal oneness with the Son of God.

You say that you have a Bible, but do not know its contents very well? That, my friend is the most awesome of responsibilities ignored with eternal consequences that are non-reversible! Open that book! Read! Think! There is enormous purpose in your having a copy of the Bible!

FOR THOUGHT: Most all things in life are accompanied with an instructional manual. The Bible is God's instructional manual to you about your life and your future. Are you ignoring the most important instructional manual in the universe? Of the 66 books of the Bible, how many can you list that you have read entirely at least once?

THE, “A,” AND “SO WHAT!”

“ . . . that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” Jude 3.

In language studies, many things are truly basic. Take, for instance, definite and indefinite articles: “The,” and “A.” Let’s think about them for a minute. “The” is referenced as the “Definite article.” When used before a noun, it often means pointedly, specific, in contrast to any other. On the other hand, “A” is the “Indefinite article,” that alludes most often to one among others whether few or many. Now the inevitable question arises, “So what?” Well, in theology, these indicate vast differences.

Consider the difference in referencing faith. One may express his joy and/or love for the Lord by the term “faith.” A good deed may be called a “faith” deed or work. However when the terminology in scriptures uses the definite article as an adjective to “faith” as in “the faith,” it is indicating specifically the system of doctrines set forth in the scriptures; those once delivered to the saints.

This is also true in other matters. How many discussions has this writer heard over the years around Romans 1:16. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”

A misunderstanding of the meaning of this verse led not a few in generations gone by to proclaim that one could not be born again from above (saved spiritually) without hearing the message of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus preached. Others went so far as to proclaim that such preaching had to be done by a minister of a specific type of church.

It was my lot to walk into a heated discussion of this very thing in my favorite drug store many years ago. Of course, the protagonist heavily emphasized “the” in the verse as teaching, beyond doubt, no other viewpoint. As a known, young seminary student, I was drawn into the discussion. I shared with them as humbly as I knew how that “The” was not in the original language, and therefore it must be correctly read “A.”

Truly, there are many witnesses of the power of God, and man’s accountability of himself to Him. Romans 10:18 indicates a true witness throughout the earth, even unto the ends of the world. Doubtless, this is a reference to the first few verses of Psalm 19, and the witness of creation itself.

Is there anything so powerful as the actual gospel message in one’s native language? I think not! But truth is truth. Christ Jesus is not a Savior; He is THE Savior, but all of His handiwork testifies of Him, and is sufficiently empowered by the Holy Spirit to bring men to their knees in repentance. So what? Well, simply put, no one will be in hell but those who have rejected such grand testimonies and opportunities to be saved.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you see the importance of language indicators for proper understanding of ideas? There are many witnesses in creation of God inducing men to trust in Him, however, Do you see that the witness of New Testament truth, and how to acceptably serve Him is restricted to the Word? How much Bible reading do you do to help you see the systematized faith once delivered to the saints?

THERE IS A LION IN THE STREET

When asked to help a needy family cut firewood, a man said to his solicitor, "I can't do that. The Russians are coming and they are red, and fire engines are red, and they are coming so there must be a fire somewhere." His wife later asked why he had given such nonsense as an excuse. The answer was simple: one excuse is as good as another when you don't want to do something. This is reminiscent of Solomon's sayings in Proverbs. He writes of fools and sluggards in Chapters 22 and 26. Of special note is this verse: *"The slothful man saith, there is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets."* 26:13. This is an excuse to not get out of the house and do something. He went on to say, *"The slothful hideth his hand in his boom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth."* 26:15.

These things are familiar excuses to modern day pastors. Personally, I have not heard anyone say that they could not come to church because there was a lion in the streets, but the probable reason for that is that they had not read the writings of Solomon. Certainly, there are many modern day excuses just as frivolous.

How easy it is nowadays to turn a deaf ear to the pleas of pastors and others to actively invest the days of life into the service of the Lord. Such are passed off as being of little value, and mostly without any compunction at all. But one may be certain, and herewith reminded that it will not always be this way. Jesus spoke of the kingdom in terms of a wedding feast in Matthew 22:11-13. *"And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. The said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Make of this what you will. The day is coming when Christian qualifications that are freely offered here and now will be extremely important, so important that those who have disregarded them flippantly will lament in speechlessness. So, let's get it right. There is no lion in the street! God's work is important! Do it while you may! "There is no work nor device . . . in the grave whether thou goest." Ecc. 9:10:

FOR THOUGHT: The blind of heart and mind believes and lives as though what is now will always be for them personally. Excuses come easily. Do they come that way for you? Do you understand that the thief comes when he is not expected? So also is the second coming of Jesus. Be done with the lion in the street idea, and trust Him as your own!

THEY REALLY DID NOT KNOW?!

“For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” Matt. 24:38, 39.

The Divine description of life in the antediluvian world is one of basic, sinful, sensuality being the driving force of life; of an epicurean society who did not eat to live, but they lived to eat, drink, and gratify wanton lusts. The deciding clue comes from the rest of that description, *“...And knew not until the flood came and took them all away...”*

It was not that they had not heard, but it was one of blatant disbelief that stole their hearing (comprehension and perception of reality) How they must have tired of the 120 year long preachments of Noah and his persistence through decades of ark-building. So, they had neither regard for God nor any sense of accountability to Him. Therein, life degenerates to the lowest level of “me only.” When that determination persists, God gives people over to a reprobate mind to do those things that are not convenient, but things that are rotten, filthy, and without compassion. So, they continued on in a lifestyle of debauchery which they must have thought would never end. And the flood came and took them all away, except the righteous man Noah and his family.

Jesus’ description of that time was given as a warning sign that the world would degenerate into that same condition as the time of His coming approached. Let the reader pause and read again the first chapter of the book of Romans. Certainly, this is a description of the dark side of civilization in Paul’s day. But that was nearly 2000 years ago. The kind of folks he described were the same kind of those before the flood. Moreover, this type of humanity has multiplied exponentially during the last two millennia. On the American scene, at least, this has become considered normal and acceptable. It is not that warnings have escaped the scope of their knowledge; rather it is that they refuse to believe them, and so discount them altogether. In the strictest sense, THEY KNEW, but tiring of the time, were shocked when the warning they were exposed to became a reality. It is to be repeated! What can be done? Keep sounding the alarm! This evil world system is going down, and all with it who love it. But there may be one here or there who will hear. Still, for the most part it shall be repeated, *“And they knew not . . .”* So soon shall the Lord appear, and the corrupters of men will cry for the rock and mountains to fall upon them to hide them from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.” Rev. 6:16.

FOR THOUGHT: The generation who remembers WWII even faintly, has seen more changes in the world than any generation before them. While most every generation has decried changes as significant signs of the end of the age, what do you think of the views of the present older generation? Are the many indicators of societal degeneration warning of the soon return of Jesus? If so, are you ready to meet Him. Do you realize you have an appointment with Him? Do you think anything will be acceptable with Him if He is not your Savior?

THEY REJOICED WITH EXCEEDING GREAT JOY!

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” Matthew 2:10.

While it cannot be definitely proven that Jesus was born in December, let alone the 25th, it is generally accepted by the Christian world to remember, and to celebrate His birth at that time. During this time of year, nights on the Judean hills can be quite chilly, making warming shepherd flames most welcome.

Perhaps it was indeed a chilly night when Mary and Joseph found no room in the Inn in Bethlehem, and were forced to retreat to a stable to avoid bitter cold in the hour of childbirth. It is easy enough to visualize that scenario.

Meanwhile, there were shepherds in the fields keeping watch over their flocks that night when the angel of the Lord appeared to them, and made the announcement that many in Judea had longed to hear. They heard! Then, they went to see this marvelous thing that had come to pass! And they rejoiced with exceeding great joy as Luke 2 records it!

Millennia have come and gone since then. Still the good news is as joyful, vibrant and arresting as it was back then. God has become a man! He became one of us that we might be one with Him! Rejoice! Rejoice with exceeding great joy!

Fast forwarding to today, it is believed that in the holiday season from Thanksgiving through Christmas, there are more emotional extremes than at any other time of year. There is something extremely sad and depressing or extremely exciting and happy in the heart of every person about the very idea of Christmas. The awesomeness of the extreme awfulness of sin, and its effects in the world and upon every person coming into the world is overwhelming, but so is the magnificent, unexplainable wonder of compelling love; love that caused God to give His only begotten Son, and His only begotten Son coming into our world under extremely impoverished conditions. Additionally, He did for Adam's race what no mortal could ever do! He wrought redemption for every repentant sinner. What then can I give Him, poor as I am? The best gift of all: what He came to redeem: my heart! And I rejoice with exceeding great joy!

FOR THOUGHT: How do you view the Christmas Jesus Who became the resurrected Christ? Do His promises live as personal guarantees in your heart? Do you agree that knowing Him is more than a mental ascent; that it takes personal acknowledgment and repentance of sin while looking to Him and His accomplishments as your personal substitute and redeemer? If not, will you trust Him now?

THINKING OF MOTHER

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." 2 Timothy 1:5

Thoughts of my long departed mother bring broad smiles and warm, lovely feelings. I am thankful for a Christian mother. She was not without sin as none are, but she had a strong value system of right and wrong, and held the Lord, the Bible, and the people of God in high esteem. I would love to tell her again how much she means to me even now as an older man. Oh, I would also like to thank her one more time for her prayers, singing hymns to me in infancy, and for the bible story booklets she bought for me one Christmas from the Jewel Tea man. I hope your memories of your mother are sweet whether your mother is alive, or if she has gone to be with the Lord. While the nation pauses to honor mothers on this one day, I am firmly convinced that the greatest honor anyone gives to mother is living a Christian life everyday, extending a helping hand to others along life's way.

A friend of mine relates a story of a precious mother who had been very ill for some time. One day, she had to reprimand her daughter for some misconduct. Instead of accepting the rebuke, the girl began to fume inwardly. She did not speak to her mother that day. As she started to go to her room that evening, she heard her mother calling, "Will you please bring me a drink of water, dear?" The girl silently and sullenly closed the door of her room without complying with her mother's simple request. Soon she fell asleep.

With the coming of dawn, her anger had subsided. "I must go now and tell mother how sorry I am for my unlovely attitude!" Softly she tapped on her mother's door. But the usual "Come in, dear" was not heard! The girl pushed open the door and rushed to her mother's side. But instead of seeing the usual warm, friendly smile, she saw her mother's features set in the cold stare of death. Broken heartedly, the girl sobbed, "Oh, mother I didn't intend to hurt you! I love you! I love you! Please forgive me for being so mean!" But the loving lips could no longer speak words of pardon. The memory of that incident so greatly troubled her for many years.

May God help all reading these lines to treat their mothers with the love and respect which will remove regrets when mother is gone. Paul paid tribute to Eunice and Lois the mother and grandmother of Timothy for teaching him God's Word. 2 Tim. 1:5. Their faith netted them eternal honor, as will be true of all who follow the Lord

FOR THOUGHT: None of my mother's children ever doubted her love for each of them. Did you have such a mother? How do you want the mother of your children to be remembered? What can you do to promote the legacy you want them to have?

THOUGHTS ABOUT DAD

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Eph. 6:4.

It is Father's Day! I wish to say that my dad, Clifford Homer Dillard was born in 1907, in Sebastian County, Arkansas, one of eight siblings. His mom died when he was still a young boy. He contracted polio at age seven. As a consequence, his left arm and leg were underdeveloped, and he had to wear a special built up shoe. He and mom both went no further than the third grade in school, but that would be equivalent to junior high school today in core subjects.

The Great Depression made life hard for everybody, and especially dad's family. There was no indoor plumbing, electricity, or other utility in those days. Life had not changed much from what folks experienced 300 years before, but back to the point. of this article.

Dad did not want, nor would he accept, sympathy from anyone. He would work harder than most able bodied men to prove his capability, and willingness to get the job done. Because putting food on the table was a primary driving force, the tools of gardening and wood chopping were well cared for and he demanded they be sharp. Of course, when I had used a file enough to make the metal shiny, and thought it was acceptable, I can still hear him say, “Son, I have felt sharper edges than that on an old Razorback hog!” Dad always worked hard, but above all, Dad loved God, and he revered His Word. We walked to church, but we went to church every Sunday without question. There were circuit rider preachers, so every fourth Sunday we had preaching, and the preacher always had dinner at our house. When there was no preacher, dad gave an extended devotional after Sunday school. Later, he shouted in church when I surrendered to preach.

There were teeth (rather, razor straps) in dad's laws, and love that was more often understood than spoken, but it was never doubted. If a preacher of proper faith happened to be in the area and wanted to preach, whether on a Sunday or in an extended (protracted) revival meeting, the community always directed the preacher to dad. He was always thrilled at the prospect and would help to round up a crowd for the preacher.

On cherished fishing trips to local streams, especially at night when trotlines were used, dad would build a fire and we would sit around it, listening to him tell a wonderful, practical, Bible story. He has been gone for a lot of years now, but he still lives in my heart and in my thinking and actions. God has blessed me so abundantly to have a faithful, devoted, Christian dad. I therefore appeal to dads everywhere to teach and encourage children in the Lord. There is no better investment in a man's life! I honor him for contributing so much to the kind of Christian I am!

FOR THOUGHT: What are your thoughts about your dad? If they are similar to mine, you have great cause to rejoice. If they are not, what can you do to provide such an heritage for others?

TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." 2 Cor.6:17-18

The true people of God are called out of a world and lifestyle of sin. They are separated unto Him spiritually through individual salvation by grace. They are separated in their daily mind-life by submission to Him through John's baptism; active church membership, and dedicated discipleship. Their relationship to Him is one of growing in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, His person, His words, and His works. I need for you to think with me on this.

The greatest problem God's people have to contend with in their earthly journey is that of false religion. It began in the Garden of Eden, brought forth murder in the 2nd generation, and global destruction of the race in the Noahic Flood. It did not end there. It was a problem in Egypt; in the wilderness journey of the Hebrews, then throughout their history. God met it head-on in the Ten Commandments, but, alas, it continues today.

God calls His people to a life of separation personally from the sins and ungodly lifestyles of the world. Separation involves individual trust in Him as the Creator, Provider, Sustainer and Protector of life. To look elsewhere for these things is likened Biblically to marital infidelity. It will surely bring not only the displeasure and rejection of God, but the sadness and grief of consistent disappointment. Stay with me a little longer.

In recent times the president of a large "Protestant" body (their word) of churches made an encore visit to Brigham Young University to deliver a speech about his concerns centered on political and cultural changes. He lauded the university as a great and admirable institution. His burden, an underscoring of the purpose of the speech, was not so much academic or informational. It was to solicit an unholy camaraderie of the two denominations so that protection might be enhanced should political firestorms assail either. This would be an unholy alliance at best, and an outright rejection of faith in God to provide adequate care for His people at worst.

The three Hebrew children of Daniel did not resist the fiery furnace, or Daniel the lion's den. Paul did not resist a beating at Philippi, Steven a stoning, or Jesus the cross. Saints in Hebrews Eleven even refused to accept deliverance that they might have a better resurrection. Do I need to employ adjectives then to convey my evaluation of the prestigious leader who appealed to the cults? Modern saints are softened, not suited to persecution at all. Being allergic to pain, this writer understands that, but insists that pain should be welcomed IF that be in the path of acceptable service to God. It is doubtlessly more difficult to live for Him than to die for Him, but if it is His will for His people to die for Him, they should be most ready and willing to do so. To look to anyone or anything else for deliverance from obstacles to Godly service is infidelity. It will be judged as such!

It should be remembered that the throne of God's Grace is still open and receptive to the petitions and supplications of His covenant people. Has that been abandoned in faithlessness?? Is the arm of our safety and well-being now made flesh???

FOR THOUGHT: What do you think will happen to churches when their trust is turned from God to the fleshly arm of others they avow as heretics? Do you think the will of God for the ages may be interrupted or that it will happen as the Word declares? May safety for time and eternity be found in the powers of men or are those things reserved for God?

TROJAN HORSE ABANDONED

"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" Amos 3:3

In antiquity, the Greeks succeeded in overthrowing Troy with the infamous wooden horse in which their soldiers hid while the Trojans brought it inside their walls as a trophy. The rest is history, and mostly well known. The Trojans were fatally fooled. But, what can we say about America? Please think with me for a moment.

There is a people being imported by the millions into the countries of Western Civilization. Hundreds of thousands of these folks are streaming into the United States with government help and taxpayer subsidies. What is known about this unusual, migrant group?

1) They have been enemies of the Christian world for centuries. Early presidents of the U. S. were forced to pay off their pirates until it became so burdensome that the U.S. Marines were deployed against them; hence, the mention of the shores of Tripoli in their theme song.

2) They consider all Christians to be infidels, and either advocate or at least acquiesce to their being killed.

3) They are not interested in being Americans, or in assimilating into the American culture.

4) They take over whenever they are strong enough numerically to do so, as it is seen in some cities now where it is reported that even law enforcement officials will not routinely patrol.

5) They do not recognize nor attempt to honor American law, but insist on their own law (Sharia) being their governing system.

6) They make demands of concessions based solely on their religion in defiance of our plainly stated constitution,

7) Their Jihadist atrocities in European countries that leave dozens dead and/or wounded have also been demonstrated in American cities.

8) So, why are they here so far away from their native culture and the multiple countries of their kin that could take them in? There is design and purpose.

The satanic plot swallowed by national leaders for a new world order of oneness that shall promote the Antichrist is driving it. To them the individuality and exceptionalism of the United States is unimportant and a roadblock to the goal.

How many have shaken their heads at the naivety of Troy? Now, it is America and Western Europe that is the focal point of stupidity. At least the Trojans were fooled by the deceitful wooden horse. Here, the horse is abandoned, the gates open wide, and enemies are subsidized to enter and destroy. The piercing question posed by Amos is so germane to our time. God help us!

FOR THOUGHT: Have you studied history enough to know the terrible impact Islam has had on Christianity in general, and the U. S. in particular? Why do you think hundreds of thousands of those folks were brought to this country? Are there sinister plots to create the third great ecumenical movement? Is there any valid reason for concern about this?

TWO PREACHERS-ONE SERMON

"In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, and saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matt. 3:1-2.

Reading further in Matt. 4:17, it is written, *"From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."* So, Jesus and John delivered the same initial message to the Jewish nation, and it was not a new plan of salvation of the spirit, but something new, and at hand: the kingdom of heaven.

Dr. Fred G. Stevenson, instructor of Old Testament Hebrew for many years in Missionary Baptist Seminary, stated often that the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God as it is variously called are one and the same, and what constitutes it is the righteous ways of God being carried out by righteous men.

Truly, the concept of such a kingdom was in play as early as Eden, but took on the necessary processes applicable to sinful men after the fall to bring them to a state of spiritual maturity. Those processes are the Bible story, the full fruition of which for men still struggling with sinful flesh is realized in this age of grace through the New Testament church. The complete fullness of it will be realized in the millennium and subsequent heaven ages.

The Lord's church, a mystery hidden in ages past is the heavenly designed climax of four thousand years of experience designed to bring men to the position of mature sons by virtue of spiritual growth aided by the anointing of the Holy Spirit which came to permanently guide the church on Pentecost, Acts 2. The church is the bride of Christ, the branches of the vine, and kingdom representative and executive in the present age.

Make no mistake about it. The kingdom of heaven did not exist prior to the ministry of Christ Jesus even though it was in preparation. Both Jesus and John declared it was at hand. Some may object because Jesus said to the rejecting Jewish nation that the kingdom would be taken from them and given to another bringing forth the fruits thereof. That simply means what was intended for Israel would not be received by them, but by another.

Thus was the kingdom of heaven entrusted to a prepared people to receive it. This was the mission of John the Baptist, and the message of both John and Jesus. What a treasure beyond words God's obedient people have today, but individual decisions are still necessary to be positioned in it.

Opening the mind to ultimate truth is God's Work: exposing the mind to the Word is the duty of man! How sad it will be for some to go out into eternity having had copies of the Bible in their position, but not knowing what it was all about. Hear then the message of two heaven sent preachers. Learn its meaning!

FOR THOUGHT : What do you think to be the significance of John the Baptist and Jesus preaching the exact same sermon theme? Do you understand that what is new about the New Testament is not spiritual salvation which has been in play since Eden, but a new code of conduct, known as the church, for the people of God?

TWO SEPARATE MENTIONS OF 144,000 IN REVELATION

In answer to a question of the two numbers of 144,000 mentioned in Revelation Chapter 7 and Chapter 14, the following is offered regarding these people.

Israel, as a nation, is predestined to be restored to covenant relationship with God, but that will not occur until at the end of this age they will have suffered Armageddon (which will be far worse than the holocaust), and will be stopped by Jesus, the Christ at His return. What remains of the nation, a remnant, will then look on Him whom they have pierced and ask "Where did you get those nail prints in your hands?" He will reply, "I got those in the house of my friends." Zachariah 13:6. So all Israel will turn to Him in trust and mirror the inexhaustible ministry of Paul who described himself as one born "before the due time." I Cor. 15:8.

So, this 144,000 in Revelation Chapter Seven are Jews who are sealed to prevent their complete destruction: it is the preservation of the nation under consideration rather than spiritual salvation as such. One must remember that this revelation is being shown to John in signs and symbols, note Rev. 1:1. It follows that a literal external seal should not be expected to be seen on the literal foreheads of these Jews, but that God, and what they understand about Him is brought to the forefront of their minds, evoking certain behavior of safety. I cannot tell why there is discrepancy in the listing of the twelve tribes, and have not found anyone else who can. The tribe of Joseph is mentioned instead of his two sons, and Dan is omitted. I am certain there is a good, sound, biblical reason for it, but it escapes me.

However, the 144,000 in Revelation Chapter Fourteen is representative of the church saints. I do not see the arithmetic as being literal in either case, but it is significant due to the specific number. 144,000 is the number 12 (governmental perfection) multiplied by itself to signify total and complete perfection. God has instituted two spiritual governments on earth: Israel and the church, both of which are theocracies in the strictest sense. Each of these is marked by the number 12. The church is being brought to governmental perfection now, and will be qualified to rule and reign with Christ in the millennium. Israel will be brought to that same degree of perfection during the millennial reign as they are grafted back into the stump and root from which they were severed (Rom. 11), and into which the gentile church was grafted.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you see how that the two forms of government God created, the law, and the church mirror one another? Do you also see how that Revelation is not a narrative, but enveloped in signs and symbols (v. 1) which includes the significance and meaning of numbers?

What is your impression of these two sets of 144,000?

UNDERSTANDING GREED

"So are the ways of every one that is greedy of gain; which taketh away the life of the owners thereof." Proverbs 1:19.

Greed is the universal requisite of natural man. It is his sinful nature, manifesting itself repeatedly, and often. Greed may be likened to the grease that keeps the wheels of insatiable desire turning. It is the sinful motivation of natural man to create an elusive, indefinable, apex of life that cannot satisfy or be perpetuated due to the deterioration of all things, and the brevity of earthly life. Greed is soundly condemned in the pages of Holy Writ. From its description of ultimate selfishness in Psalm 17:12, and Proverbs 1:19 to its marked prohibition in pastors and deacons in I Timothy 3 to the woes pronounced upon the perishing in Jude 1:11, the Holy Word underscores its wickedness.

Dreamers of an ultimate, human heaven on earth of their own making have led men far afield from the best government ever experienced on earth: Theocracy! The Hebrews knew this in their liberation from Egyptian slavery, the wilderness wanderings, and possession of the Promised Land. But greed led them to reject their government. They wantonly lusted after the monarchical form established by godless nations around them, with the human glory and personal gain it could bring.

So, over the millennia of time men ever searched onward for their zenith of a utopia on earth. From monarchical, to oligarchical, to fascist dictatorship, communism and socialism they dream and work on. It is somewhat interesting though that there is a form of government that stands out as superior to them all. It is capitalism! Communism and socialism purports to equalize the standards of men, stifling the baseness of greed. Only trouble is, it does not work because all men are greedy. So the populace is forced into poverty while the rulers bask in luxury; the ill- gotten product of their greed. Soon the system breaks down as history consistently shows.

On the other hand, Capitalism plays to the greed of men, allowing a free market place and a republic form of democracy restricted to protecting those tenants. It works well for all because it encourages entrepreneurship. Men may work and enjoy the fruits of their labors. Is it a perfect form of government? No, by far, it is not, but it is the best the world has to offer as its continued success testifies. Is greed good? Certainly not, but greedy is what sinful men are. One day, heaven will rule on earth. Then and only then will men realize their fullest potential, and appreciate what a perfect government can do, and be, for them. But sadly, even the millennial reign of Jesus will ultimately be rejected by sinful men to their own eternal punishment. What follows is a new heaven and a new earth; a new city of complete perfection for God's people. Now that is what should be the desire and preparatory work in the hearts and minds of everyone.

FOR THOUGHT: Since greed is universal in the human race, do you think there is a form of human government that can produce true equality? If not, isn't it true that capitalism offers the best material opportunities for all if they are willing to work for what they get?

"The greatest inequality is treating as equal those who are unequal." Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not?

UNDERSTANDING THE THEOLOGICAL POWER OF CONJUNCTIONS

There is great power in language conjunctions to transmit proper, cohesive thought. It is true in daily language usage, but greater in theology. Think!

To help assure continuity of thought, such conjunctives as “furthermore,” “and,” “additionally,” signifies continuing thought with previous statements. Words such as “therefore,” “subsequently,” “but,” “however,” “conversely” signal a change in thought pattern to a different or opposite effect.

Obviously, the use or misuse of these powerful unions of thought convey strong implications in both spoken and written form. Unfortunately, the translators of the English Bible choose to use what they thought was a neutral conjunctive “and” almost exclusively. But, it is not neutral. “And” being used to imply both continuous and diverse thoughts may confuse the reader, especially the unstudied one.

Genesis 1:1-2 is a case in point. Verse One denotes the Almighty, Triune, Creator creating (cutting out, forming, shaping in perfection) both the heavens and the earth. Verse two states, *“And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.”* There is no mention of the heavens being in such a chaotic state. Here, focus is shifted from the universal cosmos to the planet earth. The shift does not convey a continuation of the actions of verse one, but a different effect altogether. What a difference would be made if readers were reading “but” or “however” which is contextually warranted instead of “and.” The context that warrants such understanding does not reference the heavens being in such a chaotic state, but both were created instantly by the power of the Word of the Almighty. Yet it is only the earth which is portrayed as a chaotic mess of which God is not the author. It is simple: The perfect God never does an imperfect thing!

The prophet Isaiah underscored this fact. He wrote in 45:18 that the Creator did not create either the heavens or the earth in vain “tohu” the same Hebrew word used to describe the chaotic condition of the earth in Genesis 1:2. The method of creation is simply the Word of His mouth, and a sudden reality, as denoted in Isa. 48:3. In the ancient Hebrew language, there is a distinct difference between a consecutive conjunction and a simple conversive conjunction. Consecutive conjunctions are employed in all the verses of Genesis 1:3-31, but in Genesis 1:2 it is a simple conversive conjunction that is not to be understood as consecutive to verse one action.

While this theological explanation may not be fully appreciated by the average person, it is a vital part of the overall understanding that is to be derived from the pages of Holy Writ both here and in other places as well.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you thoughtfully employ appropriate conjunctions to facilitate both the flow of language as well as ease of comprehension within their contexts? What is the danger of ignoring context by the stubborn persistent use of the same conjunction? Could this cause misunderstanding in the world of theology?

UNITY OF THE HEAD AND BODY

Among earthlings, the head of a body is very much a part of the body, but inside the head the processes of activity and of life itself are formulated which control the body. Moreover each body is totally subject to the signals of the mind inside the head. Any exception would be recognized as a crippling disease. This is simple enough, but what is the point? Think with me for a moment.

These earthly entities are used to illustrate and parallel spiritual realities. Deep in the heart of Hebrew history, the installation of kings, prophets, and high priests were accomplished by the anointing of oil on the head that ran down on the body. The oil symbolizes the Holy Spirit of God which accompanied the anointing, and empowered the anointed one to have the necessary capacity to fulfill his newly bestowed role.

In fulfillment of that type, the God/man Jesus, in the fullness of time, submitted Himself to the baptism of heaven's messenger, John the Baptist. It signaled the official beginning of the ministry He came to earth to fulfill: our prophet, high priest, and king. Accordingly, in keeping with the type, immediately following His baptism, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in a form similar to a dove, and the heavenly Father voiced His approval. Jesus, the head of the New Covenant would constitute, in His ministry, an appropriate body for the head. That body is His New Testament Church, which was also anointed with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The term "anointed" is English. In Hebrew, it is "Messiah." In Greek, it is "Christ."

Understanding these things causes several scriptures to become more meaningful to the Bible student. It is the purpose of the church (the body) to be in complete submission to the dictates of the Head (Jesus). In spite of earthly difficulties, the body will one day rule and reign with the Head as His glorious bride.

Consider such verses as Rev. 11:15, ". . . *The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ.* . . ." Without question, "Our Lord" is none other than Jesus. His Christ (anointed body) is His church. Psalm 2:2 states, ". . . *the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed.* . . ." "LORD" is "Jehovah," (New Testament Jesus) the office God (Elohim) uses to reach out to fallen man. His anointed here references His church (anointed body) whose divine offerings to men from the Head continue to be offered though often rejected. The apostles quoted this very verse in rejoicing at their tribulation, Acts 4:24-30.

Make no mistake about it, God works among men through His anointed body, and there is great unity of the body with its head.

FOR THOUGHT: In Jesus' prayer (John 17) He prayed for His church body to be one as He and the Father were one. Do you comprehend how such unity must include the same anointing? Do you agree that it is only by heavenly help that men may please the Holy God?

USTA WASERS

Sobering insight is given to those with hearing ears in 2 Peter 2:20-21, *“For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.”* Anyway one may stack it up, it is a most serious thing to turn away from the truth presented in the Holy Word after having received and understood it.

Still, the world of ustawasers sees no decline in population. It is appalling to note that most cults report the major number of proselytes they make come from a Baptist background. Once I had some legal work completed by a rotund, jolly fellow who upon learning of my religious standing roared, “I used to be a Baptist!” Curiously, I asked what he was now. He replied, “Now, I am a------. I used to worry about living correctly, but now I don’t have to do that anymore. I let my priest take care of that.” Believe it or not, he was serious!

Having conducted more revival meetings than most ministers in a time when such was popular, I have personally witnessed to numerous wayward, backslidden and truth rejecting people who gave an intelligent testimony of their personal salvation, but whose common chorus was “I usta.” Sadly, they usta be a Baptist, or they usta be a faithful church member; they usta read the Bible, engage in private prayer, etc. What a choir they would make, all singing “I usta!”

What happens to folks that causes them to become usta-wasers? Perhaps they never did achieve a good comprehension of the faith once delivered to the saints. Regardless, once exposed to the ultimate truth of the Bible, they succumb to the temptation to follow the ways of men out of desire, or out of escape mode from ridicule. The amazing thing about most of them is that they tout their former state with seeming pride. “O, yes, I usta be.....” They have forgotten, perhaps wilfully, that we must ALL stand before the Creator God of the universe and give an account of ALL the deeds done in the body whether they be good or bad. To me that is most sobering! There will be no acceptable explanation for having turned from the Holy Commandment delivered from God Himself to us for our belief, understanding, and code of conduct. The only usta-waser I want to be noted for is that I usta be a subject for a devil’s hell, but Jesus saved me by grace through faith, and praise His name, I am not that anymore! I hope it is true for you, dear reader, as well!

FOR THOUGHT: How many usta-wasers do you know? Do you have enough fingers and toes to count them? What do you think lies ahead for usta-wasers when they meet Jesus? Do you perceive the spirit of a usta-waser creeping into your life? If so, what will you do about it?

VERILY, VERILY, AMEN, AMEN!

An old story is told of a man who visited a church in a nearby city. The minister's homily touched on scriptural truths precious to the guest. Accordingly, he responded with a hearty "Amen!" After the second such response, the minister paused as said, "Sir, I wish you would be quiet. You are interrupting my sermon." The man replied, "But I have joy in my religion." Whereupon the minister replied, "Well, you did not get it here!" In this, sadness outweighs the humor. Moreover, it is quite a discomfoting scenario since it underscores a present reality in too many churches. But, why would anyone respond with a hearty "Amen" in a worship service anyway? Think about it with me!

The exclamation or affirmation, implied and inferred by the term, "Amen!" is that of truth. If one is in solid agreement with what is said it may produce emotional joy evoking the response, but it is not heard in modern times so much as it was in generations gone by. The term comes from the Bible. Jesus often used it, but most often at the beginning of a statement rather than in response to one. It is his introduction to several statements, as in John 3:3. "Verily, verily." Without further need of emphasis, hearers understood that what was to follow was extremely important and should be particularly heeded. The words so translated as "verily, verily," may be read "truly, truly." The English translation "verily" is from an Anglo-Old French term, "verus" and/or Latin "veritatem," all of which mean "true" and gives us such terms as "verify, veritable, veracity," etc. However, when the Greek term for "verily" that actually comes from an old Hebrew word "Aval," is transliterated it reads "Amen" (This is true!). Thus, the term is commonly used at the end of a prayer to mean, "This is true, so mote it be." It is also a positive, interjectory response of agreement to any statement, but particularly one of spiritual import.

So, the next time you enjoy a statement of spiritual truth go ahead and express your joy with a hearty "Amen!" Chances are good that it will be appreciated, even fueling the speaker, especially if in a Baptist Church. If you enjoy your religion, you just might have gotten it there. Who knows? It may even awaken those nearby who have gone to sleep. Amen! and Amen!, Verily, Verily! So mote it be!

FOR THOUGHT: How long has it been since you heard the term "Amen!" shouted from a congregation in response to a truth spoken from the pulpit? Do you ever use the term, "Amen" to agree with friends even if the context is not spiritual? What benefits do you think may come from the employment of that word now and then?

VIGILANT: AN IMPORTANT BIBLE “BE”

From the writings of the beloved apostle Peter, comes this underscored admonition to all of God's people throughout the age: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:”* I Peter 5:8. But, in the view of modern, twenty-first century enlightenment, one may question the need for such ancient warnings, so think with me about it for a minute. What is this verse saying?

To be vigilant is to be extremely alert and watchful for any snare that would spoil the most important asset one has: his influence. Satan knows, perhaps better than any mortal that he cannot damn the born-again spirit of man, but he also knows just as well that he can negate the influence of a person's life so that it has a significantly diminished impact on others.

Thus does the striking admonition come to us metaphorically as a roaring, devouring lion. That lion is the same lion inhabiting the folk who yelled “crucify Him” with reference to Jesus standing before Pilate. It is the same lion that entered Judas to betray the Lord. It is the same lion who came to Adam and Eve in the form of a serpent, and who is responsible for every form of evil, and delusion in the lives of people today. Thus does the apostle appropriately warn. Moreover, Paul put it plainly to the church at Corinth, and to us all in 2 Cor. 11:13-15 that the emissaries of Satan appear as ministers of righteousness even as Satan himself appears as an angel of light.

So, how is one to know! Be vigilant! But what will enable one to be so vigilant? Familiarity with the eternal Word of God. Here then is the catch!

Satan appeals to the reasoning of mankind, who does not take into account that sin has already monkeyed with his mental faculties. Thus, with one reasoning, and judging what is good and moral from only the repository of his own experience or even that of another man, will find himself far afield from the truth of the inerrant, plenary Word of the Creator. The Bible word for this is not vigilance, but “iniquity.”

Men would do well to acquaint themselves with the Word on a firsthand basis. One of Jesus' most focused and forceful warnings is “And what I say unto you I say unto all, **Watch.**” Mark 13:37. Watchfulness, then is the insurance of safety. Vigilance: what an important Bible “Be!”

FOR THOUGHT: Spiritual vigilance is only as keen as one's spiritual knowledge. Does this not underscore the importance of acquiring deeper bible knowledge? Do you think acceptable service to God depends upon certain knowledge that it may be done correctly? What is the danger of vigilance from a human perspective apart from God?

WARM WATER PORTS FOR RUSSIA

After six thousand years of human history, the events spoken of by the ancients are happening like pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle coming together to form the completed picture. Almost nothing occurring on the international scene is unimportant. Of recent attention is the invasion and annexation of a coastal part of the Ukraine known as Crimea by Russia. This ancient country was a forced part of the old U.S.S.R. as was Poland, Albania, and other countries freed from Nazi occupation during WWII only to live under the oppression of communism as the iron curtain descended in the late 1940s. They were freed at last to live and operate under their own governments with the collapse of the Soviet system several decades ago. However, Ukraine had something the Russians needed to have under their sole authority, and that is the warm water ports of Crimea. Acquiring this would give Gog and Magog, the countries of the north an open sea route to the Mediterranean. This, among other things, allows mass naval passage; thus, the facilitated ability to make war in that region. Of course, the Ukrainian government was not about to say, "Here it is, it is our gift to you," although they may as well have done so.

The amazing thing about what has just happened here is the ease with which it occurred. This land has known ancient wars throughout history. Here many have fallen, and soaked the soil with their blood at various times and from different countries. Yet, Russia has, in blatant violation of international law simply marched in and took the coveted country without firing a shot or having any of its soldiers suffering so much as a scratch while the weakened West looked on, and promised to close their bank accounts if they did not behave. Oh, brother!

Ancient Daniel spoke of nations lending their power to an aggressor for a time, and Ezekiel spoke of how the forces of Gog and Magog, Eze. 38, would come into play as the present age rushes to its climax and subsequent end.

But, just what does all this mean? Well, there is no shortage of religionists, who have pushed themselves to the forefront for a short time, that are more than willing to detail these things, even to the cycles of the moon. However, the wise study the Word, and keep it, and these events in their heart and mind. It is fodder for meditation as the Day of the Lord approaches. All of God's people should be aware of these things: they are significant.

FOR THOUGHT: The forces of gog and magog are those generally to the north and east of the land of the ancient prophets. Do you see how forces from that general region will play a major role in the last days of this age? After reviewing a map of the middle east, how do you evaluate the importance of Crimea to those forces?

WAS PETER A POPE?

"And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."
Matthew 23:9.

Much usage of the term "Pope" has been employed of late in international news. It is an interesting word that many attribute spiritually to one man, and credit him as father (pope. papa) to the church: the successor to the apostle Peter, they say. Around Easter, the subject appears more frequently. Never mind that Peter was never a pope or a papa to any church, or that he was a married man with a stated mother-in-law. Think about it!

"Father" comes from the Greek word "pater" meaning "father". From this word we get the extended adjective "paternal," etc. Several languages have a similar form of "pater" to indicate that basic idea. The specific term "Pope" is often listed as: Pope (from Latin: papa; from Greek: πάππας pappas,[1] a child's word for father. Of all the many ways these terms may be used, the basic idea of them all is that of origin, progenitor, and creator. We correctly recognize our male parent as "father" and although the idea of caregiver, provider, protector, and instructor may be associated with that person in one's mind, the basic idea remains progenitor even in the synonyms of "Dad" or "Pop." These terms certainly are most appropriate in designating our earthly relationships, but in the dimension of the spiritual world greater, more respectful, and worshipful restrictions apply.

Spiritually, the term "Father" became especially endearing to New Testament disciples of Jesus through Whom we came to know our Creator, not so much as "Lord God" but as "Our Father:" a much more loving, mature, and endearing term of close-knit, day to day relationship, as we live within the scope of His holy will. Jesus clearly and commandingly said, *"And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven."* Matt. 23:9. Jesus also forbade ecclesiastical hierarchy in His church; Matthew 20:20-29. Moreover, those who minister spiritual things in the church are not to be considered priests any more than other members of the church because the entire church is a royal priesthood. I Peter 2:5. Neither is there any man on earth who may take ascendancy over others in regard to approaching God or finding acceptability or blessings from God. There is one mediator between God and man and it is that man Christ Jesus, I Tim. 2:5.

So, what does this writer think about all the hoopla? Well, it is just that, "Hoopla." But, it is more profitable to point out truth and errors than to negatively criticize. There is one Judge of us all. No one will escape an appointment before Him, and He will not deviate from His Holy Word. The personal responsibility to know, and to do righteously is too immense to entertain such foolishness of false religion for very long. So, is that fried chicken I smell coming from the kitchen? Maybe there is a biscuit and a little gravy there, too!

FOR THOUGHT: If there is one mediator between men and God as I Timothy 2:5 states, does that not underscore the foolishness of some hierarchies and priesthoods? Since the apostle Peter was a married man, how does that fit with the idea of a modern pope?

WAS THERE REALLY A SEANCE IN THE BIBLE?

I Samuel 28 relates the story of a successful séance. Do we believe that this really happened? Yes, indeed! The greatest reason for believing this literal event successfully occurred is that it is affirmed in the Bible. Moreover, there is additional, strong, Biblical support for it. God preserved the incident in His Holy Word, so it is to be believed regardless of peripheral reasoning. However the peripheral, biblical support is assuring.

One must consider that this is an Old Testament event. In that time period departed spirits of men all went into Hades, the world of the departed ones. Hades consisted of two compartments: one for the saved, and one for the lost. This is most graphically seen in Luke 16 regarding the rich man and Lazarus. The compartment of Hades for the lost was a place of torment. The compartment of the saved is referenced as Abraham's Bosom, or Paradise. There was an uncrossable gulf between the two, but communication was apparently possible, via Luke 16. Jesus went into this paradise, and promised one repentant thief on the cross that he too would be with him there that very day. The apostle Peter tells us that Jesus preached to the spirits in Paradise who were disobedient during the days of Noah. I Peter 3:18-22.

However, it is apparent that Satan held some sort of claim over the entire world of the dead until Christ Jesus experientially defeated death on the cross. For this reason, people who had committed themselves to Satan (possessors of a familiar spirit) had the ability to explore to some degree that world. The witch of Endor actually did contact, and request the appearance of Samuel from the world of the dead. Both she and Saul recognized the prophet. Samuel then correctly prophesied the death of Saul and his sons in battle with the Philistines the very next day.

But when Jesus arose, the New Testament is adamant that he possessed the keys of death, hell, and the grave. Eph 4:8-10. Not only did he rise from the world of the dead, he carried Paradise or Abraham's Bosom into the present heaven where the spirits of saved people in this age are immediately transported. upon death. Matt. 27:53

The difference in resting places for the saved dead then hinge on the completed work of Jesus on the cross. Before His experiential victory, it was the Paradise of Hades; afterward, it is the heaven of the throne of God. Before His experiential victory, Satan held a claim over the world of the dead for their sins although forgiven, had not yet been successfully paid for by the perfect work of Jesus. Afterward, it is the resting place in heaven, and there is no Satanic claim on those in Christ.

FOR THOUGHT: Does the incident of the witch of Endor and Saul make you more thankful that this could not happen today due to the successful work of Jesus? Do you believe individuals may give themselves to Satan just as saved people give themselves to Jesus? Does this account for much of the evil activities carried on today?

WHAT DID ABEL DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

Abel was the first person to be murdered. A debate precipitated his murder, and a proper act of worship precipitated the debate. Important details surrounding this incident are not spelled out in so many words, but they are present in the construction of the ancient language.

"In the process of time" is a phrase that may designate years or decades, but it probably indicates these men were heads of households, since in early history patriarchal priesthood was the consistent practice. So, Cain and Abel brought an offering unto the Lord. Abel brought of the firstlings of the flock, but Cain brought the fruit of the field. God had respect unto Abel and unto his offering, but He did not have respect unto Cain and his offering. Cain was terribly angry, and as he and Abel walked in the field they talked. "Talked" in the Hebrew is in the intensive stem of the verb meaning they talked intensively and heatedly. It could be called a debate. Of course, Cain was wrong. When one is wrong, there are only two options: repent and get right or become angry. Cain chose the latter, and in his anger he sought to silence the voice of truth by killing his brother.

But what did Abel do that was so right? He was a sinner as are all men, and as his brother Cain was. However Hebrews 11:4 tells us *"By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. . ."* There is the answer. It is still the answer that makes a difference in men today. Now faith is the belief in a promise. This tells us that both Cain and Abel had correct instructions about how to worship and sacrifice unto the Lord. Abel believed and carried out those instructions. Cain did not, but chose to substitute his own way of worship rather than follow the instructions of God. It must be noted that after six long millenniums and voluminous instructions and experiences, men still choose the way of Cain, which is labeled in the Bible as "Iniquity." Its judgment is certain, as illustrated by Cain.

It is infinitely more important to follow God in all things rather than substitute the faulty reasoning of sinful men. Abel got a quick ticket home in the ordeal, but by it he also continues to speak to the condemnation of iniquity in men. On the other hand, it is Cain who really lost his life, and the things that count for all eternity.

Truly, God gives us all the opportunity to believe Him and follow Him. This is the thing sinful men must do if they are ever to be right in the sight of God. Abel did, and he was so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Does the scenario of Cain and Abel continue to speak of the primary problem of mankind: how to deal with sin and ego on one hand, and how to be right with God on the other? Why do you think people are generally easily upset when conversation turns to politics and religion? Although committing actual murder over ideas is rare, do men not commit murder in their heart through heated, vehement, negative emotions? How do these things affect you?

WHAT DID ABRAHAM DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

It is easy to see the wrong things in another's life. In Egypt, Abraham lied about Sarah, and encouraged her to do the same thing in order to save his own hide. Abraham tried to help God out with Sarah's encouragement regarding an heir. That brought Ishmael into the world via Hagar the Egyptian, and a multitude of problems that continue to this day. These things underscore the sinful humanity of Abraham, and they let us know that Abraham was very much as we are. On the other hand, he is called the "Father of the Faithful" so what did he do that was so right?

In summation, one verse of scripture says it all. "Abraham believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness." Gen. 15:6; Rom 4:3. This is not the account of Abraham's being spiritually saved, but a statement about his life being righteous through explicit faith in God's every word. When will men learn that there is no good in the flesh? The only righteousness men may have that is acceptable to God is the imputed righteousness of Christ Jesus, that comes by receiving His teachings as presented in the Holy Word. Abraham not only trusted God with the eternal well being of his never-dying spirit, he believed Him in all that God told him. This then is the righteousness of life referenced in the above scripture.

Abraham went on to prove his faith in God for all time by offering up Isaac in full confidence that God would raise him from the dead because He had promised that his seed should be called in Isaac, and Isaac as of then had no children, Heb. 11:17-19.

Great and mighty promises were made to Abraham and His seed. Those promises are fiercely argued to this day among the descendants of Ishmael and those of Isaac. This is primarily a material problem as they argue who rightfully owns the land of modern Israel. It is sad that they miss the tremendous import of spiritual things in those promises. The apostle Paul explained the term was not "seeds" as of many but "seed" which is Christ, Gal. 3:16. What an eternal blessing! The lineage of Abraham, the first of a separated, covenant people constitutes the lineage of Christ. However it must be emphasized that this production is not counted in the flesh, but in the lineage of "the faith". Men have the glorious privilege today to be like Abraham. One may repent of sin, trust Jesus as personal Savior and follow as a disciple in "the faith once delivered to the saints." This incorporates us into the New Covenant, and like Abraham, be found doing something that is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you see that a lot of modern "Christianity" does not walk righteously before God because they do not believe the teachings of God that conflict with their thinking? Is there any other way for a person to have standing before God than in the imputed righteousness of Jesus? Did not Jesus say, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not what I say?" Is the initial faith experience sufficient or the starting point of doing what is right?

WHAT DID ACHAN DO THAT WAS SO WRONG?

Joshua Chapter Seven

The battle of Jericho was the very first for Israel upon entering the Promised Land. The story is intriguing -- how God caused the mighty walls to fall down flat before His people. Then it was hand to hand combat, and the otherwise most capable warriors of Jericho were no match for Israel because God was with them. In the course of the battle, Achan spotted a wedge of gold and a goodly Babylonian garment, perhaps in one of the shops of Jericho. He wanted it and he took it. But is that not what conquering armies have always done? What did he do that was so wrong?

Achan directly transgressed the command of God. He commanded that they were not to take anything of the city for spoil. Had God not so commanded, there would have been nothing particularly wrong with his actions. But God did command, and Achan directly disobeyed. Was there a reason God commanded this on this occasion? Yes, but that is another story. It is enough that God commanded, even if there were no apparent reasons.

Achan knew he had done wrong. He dug a hole within his tent and buried the booty there. But what he had hidden from man, he had utterly failed to hide from God. Great and innocent men in Israel died in the next battle because of Achan's sin. Then when inquiry was made and Achan admitted his wrong, both he and his family, and all their belongings were destroyed. Is this over reaction? Is this unduly harsh? Hardly! It is the judgment of God and exactly as it should have been.

Similarly, we must know from these and other Old Testament examples that we cannot disobey God and get by with it. Even if it seems there will be no consequence, there certainly will be, and it will be harsh. Achan lost his life. He caused others to lose their lives. And so it still is. If we disobey God, we may well wind up at the judgment seat of Christ as those with nothing redeemable in their life. They shall be saved yet so as by fire. And what will happen to those whom we influence in the wrong ways? The possibilities are simply awful.

Since each of us has within him/her the potential of sinning in a similar manner as did Achan, let each one learn the high importance of agreeing with God, and doing His will in life. It makes for peace and joy here as well as hereafter.

FOR THOUGHT: Many see the punishment of Achan as unduly harsh. Do you? Why? Is such a sin as Achan's as bad today as it was then? Will sins be as harshly judged before the Lord as they were back then? How important is it to you to study to obey the teachings of the Lord? What does Hebrews 10:26-31 mean to you?

WHAT DID ADAM DO THAT WAS SO WRONG?

Perhaps the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is one of the best known stories from the Bible. However, it needs to be revisited often. What did Adam do that was so wrong?

The first couple was given the grand privilege of living in paradise. Theirs was simply to dress the garden and keep it, and to abstain from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Sounds simple enough. However, being innocent in the strictest sense, they knew nothing about evil, therefore, knew nothing about good either. Remember the forbidden tree was the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. How long they remained in their blissful state of innocence is anybody's guess, but apparently it was not a very long time. Then the tempter came.

The tempter always wisely picks the weakest point to work on. First, he implanted doubt as to the consequence of partaking of the forbidden tree. Then he used the threefold temptation of I John 2:16. Eve saw that the tree was pleasant to behold, that it was good for food, and that it was desirable to make one wise (the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life). So, she ate and gave unto her husband and he, too, did eat. So, what did Adam do that was so wrong? Wasn't the fruit pretty? Yes, it was. Wasn't the fruit good to eat? Yes, it was. Isn't the acquisition for knowledge the perpetual quest of mankind? Yes, it is. Doesn't a man want to please his most beautiful wife? Yes, he does! So what did Adam do that was so wrong? To put it in simple terms, he disobeyed God! Eve was honestly deceived by the deceiver in the transgression, but Adam did what he did with full knowledge that he was disobeying God. Suddenly, their understanding was opened to know both good and evil, but horribly, they did not have the power to choose the good and forsake the evil. Thus sin in all of its horrible, deadly effects became a part of their lives sealing itself into the very nature of mankind so that there never has been or ever will be an offspring of man who is not a sinner. Then as a sinner, his destiny is sealed in the doom of him who is the father of it, even Satan and his final abode in the lake of fire. This would have been the fate of Adam, and all mankind if it were not for the grace of God and substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus. But that is another story--a wonderful story.

In retrospect, it appears so easy to make drastically wrong decisions with far reaching consequences. Moreover, it is still that way today. Often, decisions are made in haste without forethought of what will come of them. Many have wept bitterly with many tears, but with no chance to change what has happened. Think about Esau! Hebrews 12:16-17.

Is there anyone who would say that Adam did not do anything wrong? It was so wrong! If God says it, we do extra well to hear and obey whether we understand or not. God is totally righteous. He is the Creator; we are the created. He has not and cannot command of anyone or anything to do or to be wrong.

FOR THOUGHT: Did Eve's deception in the temptation excuse her from its consequences? Do you think deception or even lack of knowledge will be an acceptable excuse for your sins? Does the sinful rationale of people still cause them to fall in the temptations of the world as spoken by I John 2:16? Is there a way for a sinner to be made righteous? It is easy to blame Adam and Eve, but who is it that does not sin in a similar manner?

WHAT DID ANANIAS DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

In Bible times, Ananias was a man of God who lived in or near Damascus. To this same man the Lord appeared in a vision, and gave him a very special task to perform.

Ananias was sent to minister to the most feared prosecutor of God's people in his generation: Saul of Tarsus. Ananias knew well the reputation of this man, and the very reason he had come into the area of Damascus. So, what did Ananias do that was so right?

To make a long story short, he obeyed the Lord! Even though he feared Saul of Tarsus, he feared God more. Ananias did not know about the Damascus Road experience of Saul, but he did know his Lord. It was enough for him that God said "Go to him." Wonderful things happen when God's people listen to the Lord and are obedient to Him.

Ananias would never have been known by today's generation except he obeyed the Lord. He was the human instrument who baptized Saul and whom God used to restore his sight. Because he obeyed, he became a living part of the blessed Word of God for all time.

Ananias was not asked to do a great, near impossible feat. He was asked to simply do the bidding of his Lord; to do what he could do: but it was something most others could not do. This is a very important part of the story. Only John the Baptist originally had the authority from heaven to baptize. That authority was given to the Lord's church upon Jesus' ascension. Others might have dipped Saul in water, but it would not have been a heaven-recognized baptism, nor would Saul have received his sight. The Holy Spirit accompanies heaven's authorized baptism, and spiritual eyes are opened to spiritual things that the carnal mind cannot receive. Great blessings flowed from the act of obedience and that is so right!

Today, many have the attitude: "Let someone else do it." God does not want someone else to do it. He wants His people; His churches to do it. He has authorized no other. We have the opportunity to witness and heaven's authority to baptize, and to teach all things Jesus commanded. Because we can do this we must do it. Moreover, when we obey the Lord, great blessings will come as a result. Folks will be saved. Some will be baptized. The church will grow, lives will be changed, and glory will rebound to the Heavenly Father through our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Has God ever called upon you to do anything you cannot do? What? If the believer is authorized and empowered by the Word to serve God, what excuse may be acceptable if he does not do it?

WHAT DID HEROD DO THAT WAS SO WRONG?

Acts Chapter Twelve tells the sad story of a powerful man who could not get his ego stroked enough. But let's put it into perspective. Herod was a king. Kings normally have little to nothing denied them. There were some folks who had not pleased Herod, and they were anxious to mend political fences.

So, the stage was set to make it happen. On an appointed day, Herod came to Caesarea, and so did those who were anxious to mend a political breach. As Herod waxed eloquently, his verbiage was met with applause and shouts of the people, *"This is the voice of a god, not a king."* So, what did Herod do that was so wrong? Their false accolades greatly pleased Herod who was content to soak up such praise rather than put himself into proper perspective as being a mere man, and not God at all. Since he would not acknowledge God and give Him due glory in front of the people, the wrath of God broke forth upon him. The Bible says that Herod was eaten of worms, and died in that great forum where minutes before he soaked up the false praise of the people.

What did Herod do that was so wrong? Earlier he had James killed. That was extremely terrible, but here, he openly took to himself praise and honor that belong only to God. This pattern was the creation of Lucifer, and exactly what got him and his angels kicked out of heaven. How many times has this been repeated through the centuries and each time with drastic, fatal and eternal consequences.

But what does this New Testament incident teach us today? It teaches us to reign in our sinful egos. We must not rob God of the just honor and glory that belongs to Him and Him alone. Whether one is high and mighty in this world or simple and lowly matters not. Each must know his place in relation to the Great Eternal God.

However, one may surmise, people who follow Herod's example today will not fall down dead, and be eaten of worms on the spot. This is doubtless true due to the marvelous grace of our loving Lord. However the pattern is set, and just as Herod lost his life in his robbing God, so anyone who follows his pattern will lose his life. What is meant by that is even though one is saved and follows this pattern, he will lose the profit and reward of life that he could have otherwise enjoyed throughout eternity. This is the meaning of I Cor. 3:9-15 and being saved yet so as by fire. Let us not walk in rebellion and thievery toward God, but give Him the honor and glory He should receive from our life. It will be blessings now, but more importantly for ever and ever hereafter.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe that taking the praise justly due another is a form of robbery? Have you ever had another take credit due to you? How did you feel? How do you think God reacts to men taking credit due to Him?

WHAT DID JOSHUA AND CALEB DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

Of all the men above twenty-one years of age who left Egypt in the ancient exodus of the Hebrews from that country, only two lived to enter the Promised Land. Those two were Joshua and Caleb. Moses did not make it. Aaron did not make it nor any others of that generation except Joshua and Caleb. So, what did they do that was so right?

About two years into the wilderness journey, the Hebrews came to the edge of the Promised Land. They camped at a place called Kadesh-barnea. From there, twelve spies were sent to spy out the land and make a report. The land was indeed a good land yielding fruit of unimaginable quality and quantity. The spies brought back a cluster of grapes that had to be carried on a pole on the shoulders of two men!

But, Alas! Ten of the twelve spies were frightfully impressed with the giant stature of the inhabitants of the land, their walled cities, and the prospects of their families becoming slaves to them in the likely event of defeat. Was this not simply human? Sinful human! The battle was not the Hebrews' battle. It was God's battle.

Enter Joshua and Caleb. These two believed God, and they pleaded with the Hebrews to also believe and follow Him into battle. This was the God Who parted the Red Sea, gave them water from a rock and provided daily bread from heaven. This could have been the beginning of a conquest in which the Hebrews would not lose a single man, but through their unbelief it became a death warrant for every one of them twenty-one years of age and upward, except for Joshua and Caleb. What did they do that was so right? They believed God above all they held dear without reservation. Do you believe God? If so, you are doing something that is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you believe God? Do you really believe God with no reservation for all you hold dear? Do you believe that man's inability is God's opportunity? When was the last time you trusted him explicitly and implicitly as you faced a giant challenge?

WHAT DID KORAH DO THAT WAS SO WRONG?

Korah is mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments: Numbers 16 and Jude 11. His end was swift and sad. He also carried hundreds into death with him. Notice some most interesting Bible facts concerning Korah.

Korah was a very likeable man. He was a Levite meaning he was a priest and a leader of men -- one who was to teach others the ways of God. He was so well liked that hundreds of the princes of Israel and their families followed him. So far, so good. Would not almost anyone desire to be like him? So, what did Korah do that was so wrong?

Korah allowed himself to be lifted up in pride. He desired the position of Aaron and Moses as the most prominent leader of the nation. With his supporters following him, he perceived himself as great, but he felt he should be number one in Israel. As a result he called into question the leadership of Aaron and Moses in a public challenge.

Aaron and Moses did not immediately answer his challenge of leadership. Instead they took the case to God. After all, it was God who put them there, and they were dedicated to doing God's will. God instructed that all the princes of Israel should each bring his staff and lay it up at the door of the Tabernacle of the Congregation to wait for God's sign. This they all did. However when they looked the next morning, Aaron's rod had come to life, budded and even bore almonds. Thus did God signify his approval of the Aaronic Priesthood for the position of leading the people in spiritual affairs. So, what had Korah done that was so wrong? He had rejected and even rebelled at the authority of God. This is exactly what Lucifer had done before him.

What happened to Korah, his family, his followers and their families? The earth opened and swallowed them in an instant and then closed back again, and they were no more in the world of men. Surely, this incident continues to say something very important today.

It is extremely dangerous to reject and/or rebel at the authority of God. The authority of God is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It is invested in His New Testament Church. When one says no to the cross there will be eternal consequences to pay. When one says "no" to baptism and church fellowship there will be eternal consequences to pay. When God's people feel they can get along without Him and throw off his authority by rejecting His fellowship and His church, they abuse, and do despite to the marvelous grace of God, and they can never imagine how awful the consequences will be. Doubtless, the earth will not open and swallow them up in an instant of time, but they will lose the value and reward of life in the end. There will be no opportunity to make up for that mistake. Let us all be mindful of Korah for his actions are recorded for our benefit upon whom the ends of the world are come. 1 Cor. 10:11.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you understand that a bona fide New Testament church operates within the sphere of heaven's authority? Does that not mean that violating its authority is a violation of heaven's authority? Will all believers be judged on how they have nurtured and upheld that authority or how they have abused it? How highly do you esteem the church of your membership?

WHAT DID LAZARUS' SISTER DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

Mary, the sister of Lazarus also had a sister named Martha. Mary was a common name in Biblical times. Consequently, that name is used often and refers to different people. What most people remember about Mary, the sister of Lazarus is that she chose to sit at Jesus feet and learn of heavenly things rather than concern herself with food preparation. That choice brought rebuke from Martha, but praise from Jesus.

A more notable deed that Mary did is also recorded in the gospels. Near to the time of Jesus' betrayal and subsequent crucifixion, He visited the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary as He had done several times before. On this occasion, Mary brought out a box of very expensive ointment and anointed the body of Jesus. Again, there was criticism. Some of the apostles wondered why the waste when the ointment could have brought a handsome price in the marketplace, and the money given to the poor. But again, Jesus upheld her actions, knowing her true motive. She had anointed Jesus body for burial, something no one else had done or even thought about.

Because Mary put Jesus above earthly things and chose to learn of Him, she was given spiritual insight and comprehended things others had not. Therefore she was enabled to provide special service and honor to Jesus, and that was so right! Moreover, Mary's opportunity was not singularly hers. Others were there. Others had followed Jesus. Others had heard Him speak of being crucified. But it was Mary who understood, and did what she could.

It is much the same way today. Everyone has access to a Bible. Everyone can be saved. Everyone can gain much spiritual insight into the things of God, if they dedicate themselves to gaining it.

Moreover, one can be sure that even the best of deeds done from a pure heart will suffer criticism. Sometimes that comes from those who consider themselves to be close followers of Jesus. However, it is what God approves that is important.

Mary and her deeds were incorporated into the Word of God, and every generation since has knowledge of her. She was a shining example, and while she enjoys heavenly rest, those wonderful deeds still multiply and follow her to God's glory and her eternal reward.

One day the same will be true of all of God's people who put Jesus first in their life. This will make the Judgment Seat of Christ a most rich and rewarding event for all such disciples, and that is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Your time and talents are valuable, but do you sometimes sense that men may think you waste them to honor God? In studied acts of worship, do you consider any of them to be wasteful? Are they more important to you than social events?

WHAT DID MOSES DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

Aside from being pulled from the river as an infant by Pharaoh's daughter, what does one remember about Moses? Let's see. He killed an Egyptian, balked at his initial commission, and was nearly killed by the Lord because he had not circumcised his children. Also, he disobeyed and dishonored God by striking the rock instead of speaking to it. Well, those are the major sins of his life so let's look on. He brought plagues on Egypt, parted the Red Sea, gave Israel the Law and led the children of Israel in the wilderness. Wrong! These are things that God did, not Moses. So what did Moses do that was so right?

It is important to keep some things basically straight in mind. Moses was a sinner, the son of a sinner and no different in that regard to anyone in the world today. He deserved to spend eternity in hell as we all do. It was important that Moses was a fourth generation child of the Hebrews in Egypt. It was important that his mother was his nursemaid and taught him his heritage and the things of the Lord. However, the really important thing Moses did that was so right is written in Hebrews 11:24-27 *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God; esteeming the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of reward."* Notice the two words "faith" and "choosing". These are key.

Moses rise to prominence was God's doing based upon the faith and choice of Moses. His rise to prominence is not so overall important. However, His faith and choice are immensely important. Men are still called upon to exercise faith in God, and to make the choice to follow Him. That done, however, how God chooses to use each individual is His business. All are not called upon to do the same service or to make the same sacrifice except the "Living Sacrifice Paul spoke of to the Romans (chapter 12). It is just as important to be an Isaac who unstopped some wells as it is to be a Moses in prominence. Both are the fulfillment of God's will. Faith, choice, obedience are good words indicating good things in the life of Moses, and that is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Have you exercised repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus? Have you made a choice to follow Him? Are you doing it? Making right choices is what Moses did, and what every believer may do, and that is so right.

WHAT DID NADAB AND ABIHU DO THAT WAS SO WRONG?

“And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.” Leviticus 10:1-2.

Certainly, Nadab and Abihu must have done something terribly wrong to fall under the swift and deadly punishment from God. What was it? In simple terms, they offered strange fire before the LORD. What does this mean and why was it so wrong? Moreover, what does it convey to us today?

All aspects of the Old Testament worship including the erection of the tabernacle itself were types of New Testament realities. It was extremely important that commandments be carried out exactly and specifically as given.

Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron the High Priest were priests of God ministering about the things of the tabernacle. As they prepared to offer the Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) annual offering, they were to take fire from the altar and burn incense with it in the Holy Place. It is apparent that they did not take coals of fire from the altar, but from some other source that may have been more convenient for them. In doing so they were breaking the obvious link between the sacrifice of the altar, and the offering of incense, a sweet savor before the LORD. God broke forth upon them in fire that took their lives immediately, but did not destroy their clothing, by which they were carried out.

In like manner today, men think to offer to God various plans of salvation, modes of baptism, and variety in the Lord's Supper. He does not break forth upon them in fire as of old because the pattern is set, and there will be no deviation from it. Judgment is already declared for all who refuse to hear and abide by the Word of the Lord. Those who do these things follow the erroneous path of Nadab and Abihu. In the end, they will lose the value and reward of life (even if they are saved, spiritually). They will be saved yet so as by fire, and have eternity to realize and regret a wasted life of foolishly substituting the sinful reasoning of man for “thus saith the Lord.”

The apostle Paul told the Corinthians, *“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”* I Cor. 10:11-12.

FOR THOUGHT: If Nadab and Abihu died for disobeying the Lord in details of service, do you suppose people will meet in judgment a lesser degree of loss for perverting God's Word today? Does I Corinthians 3:9-16 give one a clue about this? Do you think any part of God's Word is optional enough that one can safely take it or leave it? Why?

WHAT DID RAHAB DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

The scriptures tell us that Rahab was a harlot (a woman of ill-repute). But that is not all that the scriptures tell us about her. It may be thought extraordinary that such a woman should be mentioned in the Bible, especially by name and that more than once.

Not only was she a harlot, she is incorporated into the lineage of King David and also of Jesus. Could there be a higher elevation among mortals, let alone such a blatant sinner as she? Truly, her elevation was not a random chance. She did something very right. What was it?

In researching her history, it is learned that she lived in Jericho, and that her house joined hard against the inside wall of the city. Now Jericho was a mighty city with huge walls about it. Moreover, it was the first city the Hebrews would encounter after crossing the Jordan River and beginning their conquest of the Promised Land.

Joshua sent spies to determine the strength of the city. It was during this time that Rahab befriended the spies, and demonstrated her faith in God. Because of her actions, she was promised that she and all in her house would be saved alive in the siege of Jericho.

So, it came to pass as she was promised. Her faith in God and her putting that faith in action when the opportunity arose paid off big time for her, and all in her house. What did she do that was so right? She placed her faith in God, and she demonstrated that faith by saving the lives of His people when the opportunity was her's.

Like Rahab, our life may not be cast in a day of great fame or attention paid by men, but we all have the opportunity to place our faith in God. God will then see to it that we will have the opportunity to demonstrate that precious faith. One way we do this is by faithful activity in the fellowship of His church. Another way is influencing lost men to be saved by trusting in the Lord Jesus.

Will we go down in history if we do these things? Well history is about over. Moreover, millions have trusted Jesus and lived for Him during their years, and we do not know their names. But God knows all of them. He also knows you and me today. We can claim a closeness to Jesus that Rahab never knew in her lifetime, and we can rejoice with her when God calls us home. Putting faith in Jesus and demonstrating that faith is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Which is better, to do right though unsafe, or to do wrong and be safe? Do you think Rahab had a hard decision to make? Do you have hard decisions to make occasionally? How do you make them?

WHAT DID REHOBAM DO THAT WAS SO WRONG?

I Kings 12

What must it be like to be the son of the wisest man who ever lived, and the grandson of the incomparable King David? This is the position and relationship of Rehoboam who inherited the throne of Israel upon the death of Solomon. The nation had reached its zenith of prosperity, power and popularity under the forty year reign of Solomon and now it was Rehoboam's turn to rule the nation of God's covenant people. What would he do? To whom would he turn?

Rehoboam immediately sought counsel from two sets of advisors. One set was the older, wiser generation who had served well under Solomon. The other was a younger, personally ambitious set anxious to flex their bureaucratic power and authority. Their advice was to further burden the people with great increases of taxation, and to build yet a greater kingdom than Solomon had built. This seems to resonate with present day circumstances. Accordingly, advice from the latter was set in place, and it led to not only a revolt, but to an actual split of the nation into two kingdoms. The southern kingdom was made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and constituted the nation of Judah over which Rehoboam continued to reign. The other was the northern kingdom of Israel, made up of the remaining ten tribes over which Jeroboam reigned in Samaria.

So what did Rehoboam do that was so wrong? As a new king, he was lifted up with pride and looked for advice in the wrong places. Unlike his grandfather, he was not a man after God's heart who sought His will and way in the affairs of government. Unlike his father, he did not seek the advice and wisdom that only God could give to enable one to fulfill such an overwhelming task of governing the nation.

So, what Rehoboam did that was so wrong was to seek the advice of sinful men, rather than God, about how to rule. Consequently, he suffered great loss, and the people also suffered much loss and hurt. It remains true: all who forget the sin of Rehoboam will blindly repeat it. God's ways are not man's ways. There is only one source from which we can know the will and ways of God. It is not from man or his reasoning however logical it may appear. Rather, it is from the Holy Spirit empowered, infallible, Word of God: the Bible. There is only one place where the Spirit of the Living God dwells in special capacity among His people of covenant: the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth: His New Testament church. May we be quick to always seek His advice, and submit to His ways in all matters of life. To do otherwise is so wrong!

FOR THOUGHT: Just because some people may be older and more experienced, does that guarantee their advice will be correct? Just because some people may be younger and more inexperienced, does that mean their advice will be incorrect? What should be the most trusted source of advice?

WHAT DID SHAMMAH DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

Out of the annals of ancient Israel comes an interesting, but little noted individual and event. In II Samuel 23:11-12 a man named Shammah is noted. He is one of the mighty men of King David whose name and major event is listed for which he was known. The scripture reference is a sort of "Hall of Fame" for David's generals.

One of the continuous enemies of ancient Israel was the Philistines. When they were strong, they would attack Israel in some of their weaker places and take whatever they wanted including people. It appears the Philistines wanted a field of lentils, and were willing to go to war to take it. The Israelites including presumably the ones who owned the field fled from before the Philistine warriors. Not so Shammah. He stood his ground, and God wrought a great victory that day by the hand of Shammah. Interestingly, it was a bean patch he protected, and more interestingly his name Shammah, means "there." Shammah was not flighty, he was solid—he was there. He could be counted on in any time of crisis. The bean patch is not so important as the principle of not giving in to those who would plunder and steal. What did he do that was so right? He trusted in God to help him and give him victory. Notice that the Bible does not say that Shammah won the victory. Rather it says that God wrought the victory.

Do you run away in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds or do you trust in God to help you and give you the victory? If your trust is in God, and you are depending upon His promises, that is so right! It is following a Bible example of many precedents of which Shammah is one.

FOR THOUGHT: Times of adversity and trial come to every Christian. What do you do when they come your way? Do you meet them in perceived power of yourself? Do you run away? Do you ask God for help and wisdom to meet the challenge? Think of a specific time when God helped you meet a challenge.

WHAT DID SOLOMON DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

Ranking at the top of intellectually stimulating reading in the Bible are the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. These books were written by Solomon, Son of David, King of Israel. He remains the wisest sinner who ever lived. His forty-year reign was the most glorious Israel ever had, and in it the nation rose to the zenith of its history. The construction of the temple and other great works were done in a time of unparalleled peace. So, one may wonder in view of these things just what did Solomon do that was so right?

There are always a number of things in the lives of people that others may point to and say they are the underlying cause. However, it is always the more simple things that are the most profound. Such is certainly true in the case of Solomon.

When Solomon was anointed King of Israel succeeding his father, David, he understood that the magnitude of the task was overwhelming. He did not see his unique position as a springboard to fulfilling fleshly desires and wallowing in luxury. These are common failures of so many. Instead, he took the responsibility of his position quite seriously and felt unequal to the task. In that frame of mind, Solomon earnestly prayed to the God of heaven for wisdom to lead the people of God. He did not pray for health, wealth, fame or any of the other common things men covet.

Accordingly, God both heard and answered his prayer. Moreover, God gave Solomon much more than he asked. God gave him wisdom such as no man before him had possessed, and that no man after him would possess. He said in words later penned, *"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."* Solomon looked to God, he trusted God, and sought the help of God to fulfill the task that life had brought to him. What Solomon did was so right!

What about you? Do you look to His word for instructions about decisions you must make? If you do, then you are following the example of Solomon and it is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you operate in the power and wisdom of yourself? Do you trust primarily in the advice of others? So many live their lives this way and it is wrong. Do you look to God in prayer for wisdom to live life as it pleases Him?

WHAT DID THE APOSTLE PETER DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

Most every Bible student is well familiar with the great sin of the Apostle Peter. Peter was quick to speak, and a little slow to think. It seems that he had to say something on every occasion, and often what he said was wrong. In that regard, many of us today can identify with him.

Of course, what is remembered most is his boast to stay with the Lord and support Him no matter the circumstances. Jesus told him that before the rooster crowed, he would deny Him three times. That is exactly what happened. What must it have been like to know that you not only denied, but cursed to emphasize that denial of Jesus in the crucial hour of his trial and subsequent crucifixion?

So, what did Peter do that was so right? In tears he repented of his deed as he realized the weakness of the flesh, and what can happen when real danger knocks at one's door. His repentance was genuine, and the grace of God was sufficient to forgive him and restore him to prominent service in His ministry. Although Peter would never be the same, his bitterly disappointing sin was totally forgiven, and he was so much wiser for the experience.

God's Word teaches us that *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* Peter sinned greatly, but he genuinely repented, received the forgiveness of God and went on to serve Him in a great and wonderful way. That is so right!

We should never let past sins and disappointing deeds keep us from a close relationship with the Lord. God is in the convicting business. He is in the forgiving business when one repents of sin. He is in the restoration business of broken lives to meaningful purpose in His great cause. Therefore, no one should miss out on the fulfillment of his spiritual potential, and the reward that will bring.

We are all sinners. We all disappoint others from time to time. We also disappoint ourselves, especially when we think we are strong, and we discount the weaknesses of the flesh. It is not amazing that we should fail, but it is so important that we repent, and go on in serving our wonderful Lord and Savior Who loves us. That is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Are you disappointed in yourself? Are you disappointed in others? Why? Do you tend to hold others and yourself to the impossible high standard of sinlessness? How do you feel when you know you have done wrong, then repent of it?

WHAT DID THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

Acts Chapter Sixteen records one of the most intriguing stories of the Bible. It contains the direct question about personal salvation and the apostolic answer to that question.

Paul and Silas were in the city of Philippi, a Roman colony. They had done nothing wrong, but because they had cast a demon out of a woman who was constantly annoying them, they were beaten and cast into prison.

At midnight, they sang hymns and praised the Lord. It was then that a great earthquake occurred which shook the foundations of the prison and caused every man's bands to be loosed and the doors open. The jailor who had been fast asleep awoke and seeing the doors open drew out his sword to fall upon it, supposing the prisoners to be fled. It would be more honorable to him to do this than to know the shame of failure and certain execution anyway. It was then that Paul cried with a loud voice, "*Do thyself no harm, we are all here.*" That the prisoners had not fled was unthinkable. Couple that with the fact that Paul and Silas were most unusual men who did not bitterly complain of their treatment, but praised the Lord in all things, and you have the unmistakable testimony of men who know God.

Realizing that this event was an act of God, and knowing his own undone condition before the righteous, creator God of the universe, the jailor called for a light and came into the cell of Paul and fell down crying, "*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*" Whereupon Paul replied, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved and thy house.*" That is exactly what the jailor did. Afterward he brought God's men into his own home and cared for them. There was joy as never before experienced in the jailor's heart and in his house. Salvation had come through their repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That is so right!

The centuries, yea, millenniums have come and gone, but the actions of the Philippian jailor are as right today as they were back then. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. God will then use your salvation to influence your house to be saved. This is so right!

FOR THOUGHT: Why do you think Paul and Silas could sing praise songs after having been beaten and imprisoned? Do you think many would have such grace today? Do you agree with the advice they gave the Philippian jailor about how to be saved? Have you come to such terms with Christ?

WHAT DID THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN DO THAT WAS SO RIGHT?

II Kings 4:8-37

Out of the pages of millenniums past comes one of the most arresting stories of the Old Testament. It is the story of a woman who prodded her husband to prepare a place for a man of God to rest from his weary travels; a woman who had no children, and who was blessed with a son as the result of a promise made by the man of God.

That man of God was Elisha. The woman is simply known as a Shunammite woman. One day while her son was still just a boy, he suffered severe pain in the head and died. The Shunammite woman ordered that he should lie in the prophet's bed in her house, and she directed a servant to take her to Elisha, many miles away. While yet some distance off, Elisha recognized her and sent his servant to inquire if all was well. The Shunammite woman replied all was well with her house including her son.

When she approached Elisha, she reminded him of his promise, and entreated him to come to her house to restore that promise. Elisha did so and the child was restored to life and given back to his mother. This is one of the most awesome stories of faith in the Old Testament. So, what did the Shunammite woman do that was so right?

She exercised great faith in God! It is evident from the beginning of the story that she was a woman of faith. She recognized God's prophet. She set in motion the actions that would befriend and bless him. She received the promise of a son as it was indeed a promise from God. She recognized that God could restore her son through the prophet whom He used to initially promise him to her. She did not doubt, but fully believed based on a specific promise. She acted on that faith, and received the fullness of it.

Let it be known that this woman was a sinner just as are all of mankind. There was no innate goodness in her. She had no special possessions to attract the favor of God. But, she was His child. She lived in faith and sought to advance His kingdom. She believed God and that is the best sinful men can do. That is so right!

God still looks for men and women who are humble enough, bold enough, and simple enough to learn of His promises and BELIEVE HIM!

FOR THOUGHT: Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? Are you learning of His promises? Do you really believe everything He says? How could the Shunammite woman say all was well with her and her son, knowing he was dead? How often do you fail to really exercise faith in the promises of God?

WHAT IS THE TOTAL HEREDITARY DEPRAVITY OF MAN?

"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one." Romans 3:10.

The total hereditary depravity of man is an arbitrary way of stating the condition of mankind in his natural state. Grammatically, both total and hereditary are adjectives modifying depravity. Something is amiss here. Certainly man is depraved hereditarily, but the depravity is not total, rather it is the total man who is depraved hereditarily. So, more properly stated the statement should be, "The hereditary depravity of the total man." This is what is really meant by the initial statement.

In layman's terms this simply states that every human being is in a state of sinful depravity from God's salvation in his entire being: mind, body, and spirit. By nature, he is as lost as lost can be. The Bible abounds with scripture references that this is so. One of the better known verses of scripture is Romans 3:23, *"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."* All must receive the wages of their work. *"The wages of sin is death . . ."* Romans 6:23 goes on to say.

Being made in the image of God, man is supposed to use his spirit to commune with God, his mind to think of God's things, and his body to do God's work. Instead, sin leads man to bow down to idols of wood and stone, and to worship the creature more than the creator. Sin leads man to think of evil things, selfish things, and to practice iniquity. Sin leads man to use his body to offend, abuse, and abase himself before his Creator.

Accordingly, sin is bringing every human being to death. To this, every hospital and cemetery testifies. Death is manifest in the mind that thinks wrong things, and becomes practically non-functional in the process of time. Death is seen in the body that ages, weakens, needs glasses, hearing aids, metal joints, and all sorts of help to keep going as long as possible. Sin is manifest in the spirit of man that cries out to worship but is directed in the wrong channels so that it becomes sacrilege rather than sacred.

"But I know lost people who really are good at heart" one may say. Wrong! A sinful heart is the problem with everyone. Jeremiah 17:9 forthrightly states that the heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things.

Why is this? It is because of SIN. Just think. Simply disobeying God to eat from the wrong tree brought all this. A little sin you say? There is no such thing. A chain is broken whether it be by a petite lady with white gloves and a simple lock cutter or a burly blacksmith with a hot cutting torch. When it is broken, it is broken, and so is God's law of righteousness. Because it is a hereditary part of every man, there are none who come into this world without depravity in their total being; hence, all are lost and in need of God's salvation. But Jesus brought heaven's grace and forgiveness to all who will accept Him!

FOR THOUGHT: Considering practical life experience, have you ever been around anyone who does not manifest the sin nature at times? Do you think anyone needs to be convinced of sin, due to its universal existence in people? Do you see the only possibility of salvation from sin is that wrought by Jesus, and He may be had by faith?

WHAT IS THE TRUTH?

“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” John 17:17.

A most interesting and intriguing question is reverberating from the lips of the Roman magistrate Pontius Pilate who said to our Lord, “What is truth?” That question ever remains the point of division among men. Pseudoscientists reject elements of faith in search of a truth they will not find. Philosophers offer variant, opposing viewpoints of what they think is the truth. Religious leaders propagate diametrically opposing views all in the name of truth. Worse than all the others, they purport that the truth they espouse comes from God. Surely, the fierceness of judgment is ever increasing. But back to the question, “What is the truth?”

Some say there is mathematical truth; medical truth, moral truth, religious truth, historical truth, etc. Why do these divisions exist? They are man-made, and exist mainly due to man’s desire to achieve an ecumenical mastery of life on the false premise that he is on an evolving scale of existence. All without acknowledging his Creator. In that rejection, he is allowed to proceed to the ultimate global disaster by the very grace of the Creator he insists does not exist. Let it be underscored that truth is truth no matter what discipline of life it primarily affects, and that all truth comes from God.

Jesus asked our Heavenly Father to *“Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”* John 17:17. It is God Who created and set in order every aspect of creation, thus it is His Word that is the ultimate and prevailing truth. Thus did Jesus say to His disciples of then and now, *“And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”* John 8:32

So, where does all the variant lines of so-called knowledge purporting to be truth originate? Jesus plainly identifies them as coming from Satan, saying, “. . . *He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. . .*” John 8:44. On the other hand, we are told of the Holy Spirit that is given to God’s people, *“But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.”* I John 2:27.

Accordingly, the Spirit of God is altogether true, and teaches His people in all things that are true! It is the Word of God that is true; hence, the Spirit of God impresses upon searching hearts the unity, symmetry, and harmony of magnificent truth presented in His Holy Word. All who live in this manner walk in truth, not in total separation from the flesh, but in spite of it.

FOR THOUGHT: Why do you think certain truths are constrained to particular disciplines? If God is the author of truth, does not all truth (including $2 \times 2 = 4$) come from Him? Is it possible for contradictory terms to represent truth? Why do you think this? If not, why not?

WHAT IS THIS SOUND I HEAR?

Sounds are extremely important! The apostle Paul said, I Cor. 14:7. Could one imagine singing without the distinction of musical notations of range, or an instrument being played with no such observance? It would be sheer madness and total confusion. Of course, some of us may be accused of engaging in that sort of practice as others hear us, but it is mostly in jest. Paul went on to say, *“For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?”* I Cor. 14:8. So, in conveying information, sounding an alarm, engaging in music, detecting mechanical malfunctions or so many other things, the distinct sound is important.

Distinct sounds have played monumental roles in history. God caused the enemy armies of Israel to hear the sounds of non-existent, approaching armies before whom they fled. Samuel heard the sounds of lowing cattle and bleating sheep by which he knew Saul had utterly disobeyed the commandments of the Lord to destroy all that drew the breath of life among the Amalekites. The list goes on.

In matters of safety, security, well-being, and especially eternal well-being, it is important that the sounds be distinct and clear. However, it is the delight of Satan to inspire confusing sounds in these matters from so many sources. The common denominators in those sounds are that time is unimportant, and whatever sounds one receives and conveys is just fine. This effectively, but falsely puts man in the driver's seat of eternal things rather than the Creator. Biblically, it is called iniquity, and it reaps an eternal reward no one wants.

Therefore, let the sound of God's people be a clarion call! Heaven and hell are real and will serve as the eternal home of all men according to their preparation or lack thereof. Let the eternal truth of God's Word be sounded with clarity and force for God will approve no other. Pity the Christian who is embarrassed or ashamed to emit such clarion calls for the benefit of men for whom Christ died and rose again. Judgment is coming, time is short, eternity is long, and what is this sound I hear?

FOR THOUGHT: In modern church life, has the sound of urgency regarding faith been left behind or substituted with words of a social gospel? Do you believe that no small number of people find their names on church rolls without the “Born from above, repentance” experience? What is wrong with the thinking that “Words do not matter so much since we are all going to the same place anyway?”

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

"Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." I Corinthians 14:19.

What is in a name? A rose by any other name would smell the same, but words are meant to discriminate in precise idea identification. Often, terms become polluted.

The United Kingdom has been around many times longer than the U.S. Consequently the extended time produced verbal corruptions and contractions that appear strange to most Americans. Let's look at a few.

Most states in the U. S. are made up of parcels of land called a county, with the exception of Louisiana which has parishes. In England the term is "shire" and it appears as a suffix to many words denoting a particular region. Of keen interest is the way those names came about. There is "Norfolk" and "Suffolk" both contractions of the original "North Folk" and "South Folk." It goes on. A river is an "Avon," a biscuit is a cookie, and a napkin, a serviette. The hood of a car is a bonnet, and the trunk is a boot.. One must drive on the left side of the road, and to pass a car is to overtake it. One may walk, but not on a sidewalk. It is called a footpath. It goes on!

So, when visiting Cambridge University, curiosity arose as to how the institution of learning derived its name. It seems that a couple of hundred years ago their college of engineering undertook to build a small bridge over an Avon that ran through the campus (most southerners would call it a creek). Using their ingenuity, they built a beautiful wooden bridge out of hundreds of cam-shaped pieces. all without a single fastener. So the university took the name Cambridge as a result. Later their same engineering students were determined to learn how it was done all without fasteners. They took it apart, but were never able to put it together again without using fasteners. The bridge still stands, but not in its original state.

Unlike that are the ways and Words of God: past finding out by natural men, but true, never changing, they hold fast. They are as powerful and plain now as they were thousands of years ago. Moreover, it is the joyous privilege of those who trust in the God of those words to view them from many angles, but they are always in the perfect unity, harmony, and symmetry that graced them when first breathed by the Holy Spirit!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you think language continues to suffer in various cultures because people want to express more with less verbalizing? How does this tendency affect faith? How has it affected paraphrases of the Bible? Do you thing first century Christians would be comfortable with a lot of 21st century terms?

WHEN A SERVANT RULES

Solomon, the wisest son of Adam, once said, *"For three things the earth is disquieted, and for four which it cannot bear: For a servant when he reigneth; and a fool when he is filled with meat; For an odious woman when she is married; and an handmaid that is heir to her mistress."* Proverbs 30:21-23.

Servants come in all sizes, shapes, and attitudes, but the common denominator of them all is that of service they render to others. While it may be opined that all men are servants to someone or something, it is nevertheless true that there is a difference between a servant and a ruler. Such differences are attributable to the Creator Who, as Paul said, "Made of one blood all men and appointed the bounds of their habitation." Acts 17: 26. Not only did He do this, but He also created the three major, distinct races of men in the offspring of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

"Shem" means "Name or monument," "Ham" means "Dark, swarthy," and "Japheth" means "Fair." Shem is the father of the Hebrews and many other nations through Abraham, and the relatives of Abraham of which scant knowledge is available. Ham produced such offspring as Phut (black as tar) Canaan, etc. Japheth produced the Scandinavian people of light skin, eyes, and hair. However from these three many nations have evolved through wars and other forces of intermingling. Still the predominant categories of earth's population remains basically threefold: Caucasoid, Negroid, and Mongoloid despite a mixture of these in many countries. A point is being driven forward, so let the wise think!

Some of the offspring of the early progenitors are not noted as having any specific, outstanding marks or characteristics given by the Creator. Others are. He pulled from the descendants of Shem, our father Abraham, and blessed his seed through Isaac with covenants of faith, law, and church. He divinely characterized the offspring of Ishmael as wild people who would dwell in the midst of their brethren. Genesis 16:12. He further placed a curse on the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham, making them a servant of servants. Genesis 9:25. These things are not this writer's thoughts or fabrications. They are the Creator's record.

Suppose that one should arise having the combined characteristics of the offspring of both Canaan (servant) and Ishmael (wild man). Moreover, consider that such an one were somehow exalted to become a ruler. That would certainly make the wise sayings of Solomon take on greater and more present meaning. ". . . the earth is disquieted . . . and cannot bear. . . for a servant when he reigneth. . ." Such a ruling servant would doubtless be interested in his own agenda, creating disruption and mayhem rather than compassionate good for the people over which he rules. Certainly, that should be more than enough to cause folks to pray: "Lord, please deliver us from the rule of a servant." That would be appropriate.

FOR THOUGHT: Consider what Solomon meant in Proverbs 30:21. What specifically did he have in mind? What are the problems associated with other mentioned in this passage of scripture? Do you believe all races of people may be amalgamated into one, or that the three major distinctions created in the sons of Noah will remain while the earth stands? Why?

WHEN DOES THE GREAT TRIBULATION BEGIN??

"But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief."

I Thessalonians 5:4

The title is a question often asked. Inquirers are not so much interested in the tribulation as they are trying to pinpoint the time of the rapture and resurrection. This, of course, they would determine according to their belief of when that happens during the last seven years of this age. It will be noted as pre-trib, middle of the week, or post-trib rapture. But the question seems to always come out first, "May it be known when the tribulation period begins?" Think about this for a moment.

It is frivolous to try to pinpoint these events of the last days. Even Jesus said that time of His appearing was not known to Him, but by the Father only. However, balance that with the Holy Spirit inspired writings of the apostle Paul to the Thessalonians. They had heard that the coming of the Lord would be as a thief in the night. Paul went on to say, *"But ye brethren are not children of the night that that day should overtake you as a thief."* I Thessalonians 5:4. So, all the more do we give detailed study of the Holy writings in relation to prophecy and current events.

Daniel was informed by angelic messenger that the prince of secular government that was to come (Antichrist) would, at the initiation of the last seven years, make a league of peace with Israel, but would break that treaty in the middle of those years. So the first three and one-half years would be a mock peace filled with material prosperity. The last three and one-half years would bring tribulation such as has not been seen on the earth.

If the children of light are not to be caught in surprise about these events as will the children of darkness, then it appears quite logical that should one live to see a league of peace made with Israel that they will gladly accept for all the benefits it appears to procure for them, then that would be a good time to mark the calendar.

It is not accidental that the eyes of the world are focused on the middle east. The pressure remains high on Israel as a canning pressure cooker that could explode. The Arabs want Israel destroyed, and the Palestinians want a separate state within the borders of Israel. These are significant problems which combined with many others give rise to the solutions of Antichrist through the nations which have become antichrist. The end result of all this will be Armageddon, and the return of the Lord Jesus with all His saints, including all who have been resurrected or raptured. The apostle John said, "Even so, come quickly Lord Jesus!" Amen, and Amen!!!

FOR THOUGHT: What all is implied by Paul's statement in I Thessalonians 5:4? Do you think Bible-believing Christians will be awake to the events of the end of the age? What does the phrase "not in darkness" mean?

WHICH WAY IS FORWARD?

Which way is forward? This may seem a silly question on the surface, but the answer is not so simple and clear as one might wish it to be. Motion may not always be forward, and not knowing the difference can be disastrous. Let an automobile race illustrate the point.

An automobile cross country race hosted many contestants. Each car had a driver and a navigator. The race route was through difficult terrain. One car was decidedly ahead of the others when an unmarked crossroads was approached. The driver demanded to know which way to go. The navigator said he did not know. He said that he was so sure that they would never be in the lead that he neglected to study the route. There were roads to take, but two of the three would not take them forward to their goal.

Another unlearned driver was proud of his just acquired automobile. He was so proud that he wanted to show his buddies that he could out race them. In the course of his attempt, the car came apart. To hear him tell it, he put the gear shift lever into "D" for "drag." As he picked up speed, he realized he was not outrunning his buddies in their cars, so he shifted the lever into "R" for "Race" and that is when it all started to come apart, so he quickly shifted it into "P" for "Pass." and that was the end of it.

Now if this appears ridiculous, just survey what makes a lot of religions "tick" and it will seem fairly sane. In short, motion or activity does not necessarily mean a person or group is making forward progress. Jesus indicated this as he described the religious generation into which He came so long ago. *"And the Lord said, Whereunto then shall I like the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept."* Luke 7:31-32. They were zealous of activity for the sake of activity, rather than being zealous of practicing strict adherence to the will of the Lord so plainly revealed in the Bible. God's viewpoint of "forward" is activity within His holy will. That kind of "forward" is inclusive of the old paths; of waiting on the Lord as described in Isa. 40:31. Then here is walking and running without weariness; a perpetual renewing of strength; the direction God calls "forward."

There are a lot of churches, and religious groups who think they are churches, wallowing in the pitfall of well-meaning, but carnal, religious activity. Such becomes religious protocol, and it fosters a staleness that will turn embers into ice cubes. God's ways are tried and true, and a must for every believer. They are as God told Moses, ". . . Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Exo. 14:15. Believers are to follow life actions designed by THE BOOK, to be assured their way really is forward!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you think a lot of modern-day church activities have little to do with implementing Bible instructions? Explain. Do you see much of the Bible as archaic and unsuited for modern times? Why? If not, why not? How important is it to you that churches and individuals claiming to be Christian stay true to Bible teachings?

WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?

"But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?" Luke 10:29.

This classic question penned in Luke 10:29 was asked of Jesus by a certain lawyer. It is a question that continues to be pondered as men seek to justify themselves and/or their actions in life. Of course, it continues to be asked because men are not willing to let the simple and forthright teachings of Jesus be the final answer. However, Jesus' answer is the final truth whether it is accepted or not.

The context of the question centers around the terms of fulfilling the Law of Moses. First, one is to love God with all his heart, then he is to love his neighbor as himself. So, who is my neighbor? To what degree am I allowed to discriminate, and still do what I should do? Think with me about what is being taught here.

Does this mean that one should run right out and find someone in need, and give him all his earthly possessions? Hardly! Should this happen on a wide scale, all commerce would stop and the whole world become immediately impoverished. Jesus did not intend that. In fact, the Bible teaches us that the lazy folks who will not work should neither eat. II Thess. 3:10. Does this mean that poverty should be eliminated in one's local vicinity? No! Jesus said, "The poor you have with you always." Matthew 26:11.

A true Christian should not pass up opportunities to be helpful to others genuinely in need, whoever they may be. In the "Good Samaritan story," it was the priest and Levite who miserably failed the test. They had the opportunity and means to be helpful, but chose not to become involved. Then it was the generally despised Samaritan who actually performed the helpful deed. Realizing the unknown victim was in desperate need of a helping hand, he gladly gave it. The Samaritan realized the victim was his neighbor even though he may have never seen him before, and he was also not of his race.

Jesus' teaching here is very plain and unmistakable. The neighbor to the unknown victim of crime was not the priest or Levite. It was the Samaritan. Jesus made the obvious application: "Go and do thou likewise."

It really is true. What is kept, is lost. What is invested in others is kept, and it multiplies. Christians should be keenly aware of the plight of others. Those who need help the most are most likely those who will not ask for it. When opportunity knocks, it moves on if not readily answered. Opportunities are precious, and the believer should be ready to be a good neighbor.

FOR THOUGHT: In the realm of your world, do you rejoice to help others, or do you resent the idea, preferring to think that everyone should help themselves? Have you ever been in a situation of needing help? Did you get it readily, or did you feel others shy away from your need? How did those things make you feel? Who do you consider to be your neighbor?

WHO WANTS A CHURCH?

"Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."
Ephesians 3:21

The strength of America serves as insulation from the ills of the rest of the world, at least for a time. Whether it is a cultural trend, a financial difficulty, an esteem of religion, or a shift in governmental thinking, it all comes into American life, but usually more delayed and slowly. That process is speeding up due to the wearing away of the insulation. I illustrate the point with this story.

Spearheading mission work of the churches of the American Baptist Association in Australia, Laura and I visited that country in 1972. One of the goals was to help secure an advantageous place for a permanent church building of the initial mission begun by Calvary Baptist Church in Duncan, Oklahoma in 1968. In the process, several business, and civic leaders were consulted, and potential sites visited.

Success was achieved in the procuring of a two-acre estate called "Mountain view" in the Leumeah area near Sydney. A New Testament church is located there today.

However, in the search for suitable property, a number of new housing areas were considered. Based on the thinking that new housing areas in the U.S. desired a church adjacent to them, authorities were consulted about the possibility.

To the dismay of the missionary and myself, the reply most often received was, "Who wants a church?" The tone of the reply conveyed more than the simple words. It was so unrealistic to hear such disdain for the work of the Lord, and it was inconceivable that such an attitude would ever prevail in America.

Fast forward to today! Nearly fifty years have passed since that long ago visit. In that time much has occurred to marginalize the work of the Lord in general and churches in particular. One might not be shocked to hear "Who wants a church" not only in America, but in the southern "Bible belt" as well. The insulation is gone. America walks much in step with the nations of the world with whom the church means little to nothing at all.

As general esteem of the Lord's work diminishes, His true churches may be entering what could be their finest hour of standing for the faith once delivered to the saints. Doubtless, markers indicate the nearness of the end of the church age, the glorious return of our Lord and Savior, and the eternal joy of rapture and resurrection. It is time for Christians to look up with excitement over the millennial age that is soon to happen.

On that day, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ will be honored as the bride of Christ, and elevated to rulership with Him in that marvelous thousand years of peace. But it does not stop there as Eph. 3:21 declares the church will provide glory to God throughout all ages, world without end. Amen! Who wants a church? Is it any wonder John prayed, Even so, Come Lord Jesus!

FOR THOUGHT: Do you perceive a rapid decline in appreciation in society for the Lord's work? What do you think are the main contributing factors for what you see occurring? How do you evaluate your opportunity to stand against encroaching evils that marginalize the church? Are you thankful for insight and opportunity or would you rather not have such?

WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

"Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation."
Malachi 3:8-9.

I know, I know! Everybody's mind is made up from the title of this article what it is going to be all about. When pastors choose this title and use Malachi 3:8, it is almost always a message of giving money to the cause of the church. Certainly, a lot of churchgoers do rob God in the matters of tithes and offerings as the context of this passage of scripture indicates, but that is not the primary burden of this article. So how could this be any different? Well, think with me and see! Robbery of God takes on a much grander scale of which tithes and offerings are but a symptom. Consider that when one repents from sin and receives Christ Jesus into his heart, he is born from above, and his spirit sealed with the Holy Spirit of God, Ephesians 4:30. That person has been purchased by the blood of Jesus. He is no longer his own! As such he is to render praise and honor to his Savior (how logical). It is good that a large number do exactly that, but a growing number of present disciples give place to any excuse to miss church worship services or to give of themselves in any noticeable way to honor the God of their salvation. Many believers would be embarrassed beyond words if called upon to lead in prayer, because prayer is a stranger to them.

So, how many ways will a man rob God of the just honor due Him? Will a man rob God of the glory He is to receive from him in His church; of His rightful place in his heart; of His rightful place in his home; in the power of personal testimony that he is failing to portray to others? It seems the list of ways modern Christians do rob God is quite long!

The problem is a heart problem! Moreover, that speaks to the attitude toward tithes and offerings. Jesus pungently said it when He taught that where a man's heart is, there will also be his treasure. Christians should determine where their money goes, and where their leisure time is spent. Wherever they find joy, it is where their treasure is. Certainly, it is a precious few who find their heart, and their treasure in the things of God. Among far too many the decisions are repeatedly made to rob God! It is the kind of robbery that a sermon, or brow-beating, or grudging change will NOT remedy, because it underscores heart trouble.

Knowing that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of deeds whether they are good or evil, wisdom cries out for a return of the heart to the God who bought it with His precious blood. When that cry is heeded, all the other things will be properly placed.

FOR THOUGHT: As a Christian, do you see yourself as actually being purchased and owned by the Creator/Savior you claim to trust? If not, why not?

If God prescribes Christian behavior, and if Christians choose their own criteria instead, do you consider that to be robbery? Why? If not, why not?

WORDS SIMPLY FAIL US

How many times have all of God's marvelous people approached the throne of grace in prayer, wishing they were better equipped in both the excellence of language, and a more perfect understanding of just how to best present their petitions? Yet, despite one's infirmity in language, the prayer is made, and made to be acceptable to the Father who hears and answers. How can that be?

Each of us, no matter the level of education, is hampered somewhat by linguistic infirmity. But there is no such infirmity in this or anything else with God. So He Who looks on the heart reads (hears) in perfect language unknown to us. Consider that this is exactly what is revealed in Romans 8:26, "*Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.*" How marvelous it is that our Heavenly Father, receives our petitions in divine perfection despite our limitations. Let me illustrate.

A number of years ago, my wife and I were in San Jose, Costa Rica. I was to speak at the seminary there. We enjoyed the continuing fellowship with Gene Ray and Barbara Ward. One evening, the four of us were shopping at a center. The Wards had brief business to attend, so Laura and I decided to do a little window shopping. She decided that she wanted a coca cola. We went into a store, and I stood back to allow Laura this experience alone. The clerk understood "coca cola" and readily produced one. Laura dug out all the Costa Rican currency she had which was several pieces to allow the clerk to take what was necessary in payment. It was then that she found herself broke and the clerk asking for something more which she did not understand. After a few non-productive exchanges the clerk (who was asking for a deposit on the bottle) produced a medium sized, new plastic bag. The coke was poured into it and a straw placed in it, and the bag was handed to astonished Laura. Of course I broke up laughing as did she and the Wards as we walked out of the store.

The illustration may be crude, but here was a case of profound linguistic infirmity. Still, based on the required payment being made for the contents of the bottle, Laura got her coca cola anyway.

Perhaps none of us pray the perfect prayer outside of repeating the model prayer Jesus gave to us, but there is another power in play. It is the power of the Spirit of the Living God Who knows in minute detail the heart of the petitioner, and presents its content to the Heavenly Father in totally acceptable form. Thus, we are admonished in Hebrews 4:16, "*Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.*" In simple words, of scripture ". . . Ye have not, because ye ask not." James 4:2 . Linguistic infirmity does not block petitions of the heart!

FOR THOUGHT: How many times have your most sincere and urgent prayers gone up to God without your having uttered a word verbally?

Have you ever used your perceived inability to properly express a prayer to keep you from praying? Why?

What do you think would increase your confidence in your prayers being heard and answered?

WORLD WAR II SUGAR!

The Bible Promise is so clearly set forth in Luke 6:38, *"Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."* Attention is drawn to the action: "give, and it shall be given unto you." Also attention is drawn to the source: "shall men give into your bosom." Here is how it happened once upon a time.

During World War II, sugar, among other things was rationed. Folks in the country found it difficult to have enough for household use plus for canning purposes. Now it happened that my family lived in the country, near the backside of Fort Chaffee. Tanks of the 4th Armored Division and other vehicles were common around our house, and soldiers bivouacked so close we could see them, and particularly so when they had chow time.

We were poor as were most in those days, but we had lots of milk from old Jersey. Mom would say to us kids, "Take these two gallons of cold milk to those soldiers." They were grateful for the gift, so grateful they pointed out a tree and told us to dig there after they left. We did, and there all wrapped up was a large sack of sugar. They could not give it to us, nor did they dare return it for fear of getting less next time. So, our family was blessed with something we needed in exchange for something we had plenty of, but was a blessing to some great young men who probably died on foreign soil.

So, what is the point? One may, in self pity, lament his lack, but it is better to focus on his surplus. There are others who have need of what one has, or knows, and how many desperately need the joy of a born-again, knowledgeable Christian! To busy oneself in ministry to the needs of others is the path to a fulfilled life, all the material things that are necessary, and the reward of heavenly commendation! Got milk? Need sugar? Give, and it shall be given to you! Do you want the undying devotion of a true friend? Share Jesus and His love with your acquaintances and enemies. Even in secular employment one must give of his skill and labor before receiving the reward of it. Seek out ways to beneficially serve others, and you will reap good measure!

FOR THOUGHT: Have you noticed that it truly is more blessed to give than to receive? Have you also noticed that everyone loves the person who is doing things to help others? Where does this good measure spoken of come from? Is it not from men? List a couple of things you purposefully did recently to be helpful to others.

WRITE A BOOK!

"Brother Dillard, will you please put all this stuff you are writing about in a book?" The question has been repeatedly asked over the years. The answer is "Probably not!" It seems there is something innate in a lot of us to write what we have learned in a book for posterity. At the same time, there are many of us who want a book of someone's writings to take up space on a bookshelf until we die, and someone else has the pleasure of tossing it.

The wisest offspring of Adam, Solomon, said, "*. . . of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.*" Ecc. 12:12. To be sure, bookstores and libraries suffer no shortage of books on practically every conceivable topic, from most every conceivable viewpoint. Still, it is the thrill of some to discover a book that coincides with their thinking or challenges them into novel arenas. Let me illustrate.

I was flying in a small plane with two fellow ministers listening to their conversation. One was excitedly proclaiming the joyful benefits he had gotten from some off-the-wall author. The other expressed his deep desire to obtain the book under discussion. Seeing an opportunity, I declared the discovery of a book that was so rich and deep that it never ceased to thrill and amaze me each time I reviewed it. Both of them turned in excitement toward me, and asking "What is this book you are talking about, we want it, too." I replied that it was the book of Romans by the apostle Paul! Their faces fell in disappointment. I thought for a moment they might throw me out of the airplane. But such is the nature of the flesh; always ready to hear someone who may not be dry behind the ears, but has a gift of linguistic expression instead of understanding of the eternal Word.

Some say the Bible is just too hard to understand. Well, poor ole God! He is smart enough to create the universe and all therein, but not smart enough to write a book that His created subjects can understand. Hummm!

Therein lies the problem. If we cannot understand the communication of our Creator, then something has interfered with our mechanism. That something is sin! Repented from, one may be blessed with understanding and never ending blessings that flow as a river of life from that blessed book!

Truth is there are no shortcuts to spiritual growth, understanding and blessings. It is all in the book of books so well preserved and made available to us. If God wrote a book, and hardly no one reads it, but is content to let it collect dust on a bookshelf, then what are the prospects for usability of any book this poor writer should put together? So, aside from three theses in seminary, and three small booklets, and maybe a thousand short articles, no books are planned, but God's book remains the number one recommended reading for eternal benefit!

FOR THOUGHT: Why do you suppose some people get excited more easily over what someone unknown may write than over what the Creator of the universe has written? Do you think there is a reason that many Bible truths are hidden from unspiritual minds? Since a relationship with God is strictly personal, do you think each person will be answerable to him alone, or will Dr. Whizbang stand up for him in judgment?

WWJD OR WDJD???

What a difference the change of one little alphabetic letter can make when one knows the message those letters carry. The change of one of them can signal a complete reversal of viewpoint that depicts radically altered behavior. Think about this for a moment with me.

WWJD is a set of letters that stands for the phrase: "What Would Jesus Do?" It has become popular among nominal Christians who prefer to act on their own thoughts about Jesus, and what his actions and decisions would be in a given situation. Does this sound good? Well, it deserves detailed thought. For example: Communion is a church ordinance. Those outside the church want to take it with your church or you are visiting another church, and you want to participate in the ordinance with them. Is it correct to do so? Well, WWJD. What would Jesus do? He is kind and not in the denial mode, so "yes" it must be O.K. Another example is someone wants to join your church, but states they cannot be baptized. Might the church receive that person as a member without baptism? Well, WWJD. Surely He would not turn anyone away, so, "yes," that will be O.K. Examples could continue. Such examples are decisions made without consulting the Bible in detail. It puts man in God's chair. Men are not big enough to sit in His chair! Accordingly, there is a much better phrase to call to mind.

WDJD: What Did Jesus Do? I Peter 2:21 tell us, *"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."* There is a Bible term for proceeding in spiritual affairs without obedience to the actual teachings of the Word. The term is "iniquity," and those practicing it will certainly meet it again in judgment. Sadly enough, there appears to be a strong mindset among nominal Christians to just do what people want if it is not totally, morally corrupt. God is replaced with humanism. The Holy Word is negated by the superior thoughts of religious, but sinful men. Placating the whims of men has become more important than obedience to the King of kings. The attitude prevails that anything negative must be replaced with positive things. Clear teaching of the Word reveals that a truly rude awakening awaits the practitioners of WWJD. Amid the tears and gnashing of teeth they will realize the eternal loss of their error of substituting their thinking for the clear teaching of Holy Writ. Ask me not WWJD, rather ask WDJD!

FOR THOUGHT: How often do you witness human reasoning substituting Bible teachings in order to facilitate modern desires of nominal Christians?

Is the Bible truly archaic or may it be relied upon as a modern day rule of faith and practice?

Will Jesus bend His eternal Word to accommodate judgment of otherwise well-meaning folks?

YE ARE THE "WHAT?" OF THE WORLD???

Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." Matthew 5:14. Matthew 5:1-2 makes it clear that this statement is made to His disciples rather than to the multitudes from whom he had retreated. Think with me about what this means! The idea of this statement being made to a group instead of an individual is reinforced by the comparison to a city set on a hill. Moreover, here is something beautiful about the King James Version of the Bible. Some folks don't like the archaic English, but the translation is distinctly true to the original Greek by distinguishing singular from plural and nominative from objective case in the second person. "Ye" is singular, and "you" is plural, the first nominative and the other objective in grammatical case. So what we have here is Jesus referring to a plural group as singular, "ye," in the nominative form. Hence, it is understood that this reference is to His church which this group of saved, baptized disciples were. So, it is His church, the pillar and ground of the truth; the fullness of Him that filleth all in all that is the light of the world, and as a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden.

The individuals that make up the church are addressed in the following two verses. Men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel, but in the candlestick that the benefit of light may be realized. The candlestick is presented in the Bible as a type or symbol of the church. Furthermore, such lighted candles are to let their light shine before men. This accomplishes two things: men will behold (be influenced) by that light, and it will glorify the Heavenly Father. The terminology in verse 16 is "Let your light so shine before men..." Here the second person "your" is plural indicating a direct address to everyone numbered in the group or church. "Light and darkness," indicating opposite states are also used to indicate knowledge as opposed to ignorance, and righteousness as opposed to evil. These latter things are what Jesus referenced.

Make no mistake about it. Men become aware quickly of one who is faithful to the Lord's church, and who lives in accord with the teachings of Christ Jesus. They also note quickly those who "say but fail to do," and categorize them as hypocrites. Such fails to dispel the darkness, and to glorify the Heavenly Father.

The Psalmist David declared, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so..." Psalm 107:2. Redeemed folks should be happy folks. Redeemed folks should jump at every chance to glorify God by relating what He has done for them in providing eternal salvation, and an acceptable avenue of service. If they do this, they will be letting their light shine! Every true Christian should be such a light in this sin-darkened world.

FOR THOUGHT: Do you see how Jesus' teachings here do not admit going to church, but being the church? Either one is or is not an intricate part of the church 24/7!

Name at least five things a church member may do to let his light shine before men.

If the church is the light of the world, how bright is that light shining?

DEVOTIONS FOR EVERYDAY FAITH

Drawn from a lifetime of pastoral ministry, biblical study, and daily observation, these devotional reflections invite readers to see God's truth in ordinary moments.

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