

SUMMARIES
OF THE
NARROW WAY

SUMMARIES OF THE NARROW WAY

A Collection of Biblical Considerations



Mark W. Harrison

All Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible:
Authorized King James Version

The abbreviation cf. used throughout signifies compare.

SUMMARIES OF THE NARROW WAY

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*Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate,
and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction,
and many there be which go in thereat: ¹⁴Because
strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which
leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

—Matthew 7:13-14

PREFACE



Books here, books there, books everywhere! I know the world isn't waiting on pins and needles for another book to read; nevertheless, the burden was placed upon my heart to articulate my fervor on paper. In the words of the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, "...*his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay*" (Jeremiah 20:9b).

It is odd to become weary of the forbearance of a task, but when the "*still small voice*" of the Lord continues to goad the heart, that is exactly what happens. Such is the responsibility the Lord lays upon the heart of His children. The work assigned from Heaven, for each of us, is not a load of inconvenience; rather, it becomes burdensome and heavy if it is not acted upon. So, it is in writing the pages of this book I find my rest and release, my joy and rejoicing, and the remedy for the burning in my bones.

This work is a plain work, written in plain English, by a plain man, for plain people. No effort has been exuded

PREFACE

to be overly technical, or so bogged down in theological detail that the reader becomes discouraged. It was never my intention (neither indeed could be) to produce a professional theological or literary work; however, we feel strongly that nothing presented in these pages would be found to be contrary to sound Christian doctrine, as major points are supported with Scripture. You may find grammatical misgivings, but we trust you will overlook these issues to the optimistic end of Christian edification.

The necessity for Jesus to be our portion, both in this life and in the next, is the common thread woven throughout each of these messages. My prayer is that all who read these pages would be blessed with the great, precious truths of the Savior, and thereby secure a little more light for the “narrow way.”

M. W. H.

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

... and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

—1 Corinthians 12:31b



When Paul concludes the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians, he mentions that he is going to show a “*more excellent way*.” This “*way*” is neither a method nor a technique. It is not a custom, style, pathway, direction, aspect or example. Rather, this way is a power that propels, a force that fuels, the energy that quickens and the essence behind the Abundant Life itself. This “*more excellent way*” is given to those who have entered in through the strait gate and walk the narrow way. This “*excellent way*” is the way of the finest quality; it is a way that is powerful and most effective; it is the way of sure victory; a way that will never decay, fail or die. This way is the glory of the Ancient of Days Himself, the triumph of the One who died on the cross; thus, it is a way that covers a multitude of sins. Those who have been born again by the Incorruptible Seed, and follow Christ wherever He goes, have found this way to be

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preferred above all others. This “*more excellent way*” is LOVE, or as the King James renders it, “*charity.*”

This “*more excellent way*” is expounded in 1 Corinthians 13, which is often referred to as the great love chapter of the Bible. This distinguished chapter is preceded by a wonderful illustration of the gifts of the Spirit in chapter 12, which are given to those who are “*born of the Spirit*” (cf. John 3) and are for the purpose of edifying the church. Great care is taken by the Apostle to emphasize that even the least honorable gift is of vast importance. Straightway, the 12th chapter concludes with the most unusual, but profound, statement, “... *and yet I show you a more excellent way*” (1 Cor. 12:31b). The groundwork laid in this verse leads the reader to believe that what the Apostle is about to say is very significant; so significant, in fact, that it is supreme to what he previously stated about the gifts of the Spirit. In other words, the production of this “*more excellent way*” alone would be enough to strengthen the church and provide for its well-being. This “*way,*” the Scriptures declare, is superior to the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, healing or even working miracles.

This wonderful, poetic 13th chapter would fit very well in either of the Old Testament books of Psalms or Song of Solomon, but the most fitting place for it to be is right where it is—in the center of the New Testament of our

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Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Love is the very heartbeat of God's plan for the redemption of man; it is the Decalogue of the gospel written, not with ink or chiseled on stone tablets, but by the Holy Spirit in fleshy tables of the heart.

The flowing eloquence of 1 Corinthians 13 warn the believer of the consequences of gifts exercised apart from love, and describe how love is manifested to others when it is put into action. Additionally, we are told how love is set apart from all gifts by its unfailing, ever abiding qualities:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. ²And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not [love], I am nothing. ³And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not [love], it profiteth me nothing.

—1 Corinthians 13:1-3

We can be blessed in possessing all manner of gifts and talents and even sacrifice to the point of death, but

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without love we are nothing. **“Nothing”**—this word is a worrisome word indeed. “Nothing,” is a sea of emptiness, a vast wasteland of vanity. “Nothing,” is without form and void, dark and deprived of the moving of the Spirit of God. This word “nothing” informs us that a gift exercised without love is like a well without water, clouds without rain. It is nothing! It profits nothing! It is like a stack of wood, hay and stubble ablaze and going up in smoke (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-15). This truth should point us back to the words of the Lord Jesus when He said,

*...without me ye can do **nothing** (John 15:5b).*

The only way a spiritual gift can be effectual is to be energized by the One who is the very source of the power. It is only through the Vine of love that the branch can be nourished for service in a *“more excellent way”* (cf. John 15). The love of Christ is something in which we must be familiar; it is a love we must receive and experience ourselves. The love of Christ is our root, our foundation and our support on all sides. The love of Christ must be known to the believer in every way—in length, breadth, depth and height. To really know this love is to have a knowledge that exceeds all knowledge (cf. Eph. 3:18, 19). This knowledge is not of the mind that puffs-up, but rather heart knowledge which edifies all

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who are touched by its influence (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1). Scripturally speaking, a Christian cannot come to full maturation in just doctrine and faith alone, he must also be sound in love and patience (cf. Titus 2:2).

When love is put into action, it becomes a most powerful force to those in which it is ministered. It allows the gifts of the Spirit to be empowered to strike the benefactors heart as does an arrow from the hunters bow, and when it delivers its payload, it has a profound effect upon lives. Love pours life into the deadness of the heart that is discouraged, defeated and cast down in the mire of sin. The power of love works in the heart a miracle that only God can do, and the evidence of His work reveals His glory when it is outworked into the life. Love is patient, kind, not jealous, rejoices in truth and endures the hardships of the world as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. There is no doubt that we would lose heart in this discouraging world if it were not for hearts knitted together in love.

This “*more excellent way*” is the way even of the ancient Law of Moses, as we are told that love for God and love for our neighbor are the undergirding and support of the Law itself. The Law of old is fulfilled in one simple four letter word: L-O-V-E (cf. Matt. 22:37-40), and only One has succeeded to fulfill it to the very smallest jot and tittle.

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Actually, the brief chapter of 1 Corinthians 13 is not a definition of love; rather, it is a chronicle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the only One who ever drew a breath that loves the unlovable, touches the untouchable, heals the incurable, consoles the inconsolable, binds up broken hearts, and brings hope to the hopeless. Jesus makes the things which are impossible (with man), possible. What describes the work of Christ more than the following verses from this wonderful chapter of the Bible?

[Love] suffereth long, and is kind; [love] envieth not; [love] vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, ⁵Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; ⁶Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; ⁷Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

—1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The deep-rooted essence of Christ and His love was demonstrated even on the cross, while men were in the process of doing the unthinkable to Him. The Savior sought the Father in prayer—not for Himself—but for those who did their worst against Him. Jesus tenderly prayed,

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Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do...

—*Luke 23:34a*

Such is the testimony of the love of Christ, not self-serving, but always freely giving to the object of His affection—“*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends*” (John 15:13). The heart that lives enveloped by the love of Christ possesses confidence in his or her relationship with God, for love casts away all kinds of fear, and will give boldness in the Day of Judgment (cf. 1 John 4:17-18).

The love of Christ is a hereditary trait of His children and serves as a litmus test for all who claim to be His. To know love, is to know Christ; to know Christ, is to know the Father. This knowledge is to be the most desired among the redeemed. We are told of love’s part in the true knowledge of God by the apostle John,

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. ⁸He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

—*1 John 4:7-8*

We live in a day when many tattoo their bodies in an attempt to somehow identify themselves in who they are

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and what they believe, but the Christian does not need such a device for identification. Love is to be the identifying mark of a Christian. Jesus said,

*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples,
if ye have love one to another.*

—*John 13:35*

Receiving the love of Christ is not conditional, for He loved us even when we were rebellious against Him (cf. Rom. 5:8-10), but our ability to love in His “*excellent way*” is very much conditional. It is easy to love those who love us, but it is an entirely different matter to love those who disdain us. To love in the sense of 1 Corinthians 13 requires that our hearts be changed, regenerated, even “born again.” Man cannot love in His way until the Spirit of God comes to the heart through belief of the gospel. The “*excellent way*” is Divine love that puts to shame the futile attempts of man to manufacture this divine quality apart from Christ. Everything man has ever put his hand to do (apart from God) is temporary and will eventually fail—no matter if it is an idea, product, relationship, organization, or even a religion. The one thing in God’s economy that will never fail is love. When everything else fails, love succeeds:

[Love] never faileth (1 Corinthians 13:8).

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“Never,” is a long time. “Never,” is infinite. “Never,” is eternal. The reason love never fails is because “*God is love*” (cf. 1 John 4:8b). We never have to fear that the pure light of God’s holy love will ever be extinguished; as our Father in heaven is eternal, unchanging and unfailing—so is love. Any doubt of the victory and longevity of love was erased when Mary Magdalene came upon an empty tomb. The strength of love is the strength of Jesus Christ Himself, and since Christ lives and cannot fail—love lives and cannot fail. Love was the power that moved Jesus to lay down His life on the cross for us, and love is the power that raised Him from the grave, vanquishing the greatest foe of mankind—death. Likewise, the heart that possesses the love of Christ is assured of everlasting victory, it is guaranteed! Today, an invitation is given by the Lord Jesus Christ as He stands knocking at the door of many hearts and says,

...if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

—*Revelation 3:20b*


Our partaking in this divine nature, through the new birth, is riches that no temporary material gain can rival. Love is the most satisfying possession, it is eternal treasure which can be deposited in the bank of Heaven—

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where moth and rust cannot corrupt, and where thieves cannot break in and steal (cf. Matt. 6:20); for that reason alone its value exceeds all. Love is greater than anything that can be gained on Earth, as it is the one thing in your grasp that cannot be taken away, even the grave cannot separate you from this heavenly wealth. Read what the Word of God says about the permanence of love,

... we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. ³⁸For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,³⁹Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:37-39

Do you want to build up and encourage your brothers and sisters in Christ? Then simply love your brothers and sisters in Christ. There is neither a reason to fear that we lack the talent to serve God, nor is there a need to wring our hands over trying to figure out what our particular gift happens to be. The Lord will manifest your gift in His own time. We have been assured that if we abide in Christ we will serve, and live, in the “*more excellent way.*” 

ENCOURAGEMENT IS IN THE EYE OF THE ETERNAL

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; ¹⁸While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

—2 Corinthians 4:16-18



When we need to be encouraged, chances are our circumstances have turned sour, the situation around us is not in our favor and it looks as though we are losing ground. As we walk the pilgrim pathway the flame of hope can grow dim as we observe that iniquity has abounded, the love of many has waxed cold, and this deteriorating condition seems to grow progressively worse with each passing year.

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Discouragement can come when we have been troubled, perplexed, persecuted and even forsaken. Contrary to popular theology, all of these discouraging words actually describe the experience of a Christian walking the narrow way. The question actually is,

“How can one stand such pressure without losing heart?”

A very fitting teacher to give us answers in such matters is the apostle Paul, and he, through the Holy Spirit, tells us that the only way to press forward outwardly is to look inwardly—to see the unseen. The Apostle tells us plainly that to receive encouragement we are to look away from the temporary things of the world, and look toward the eternal things of Christ; doing this brings us to the place where we are not relying on our own abilities, but the *power of God* (cf. 1 Pet. 1:5). This is the essential key for a healthy Christian heart. Anytime we are focusing on our own strength and wisdom, we are a prime target for discouragement.

We are introduced to our focal Scripture with the phrase, “*For which cause we faint not.*” This is actually the second time, in this fourth chapter of 2 Corinthians, that Paul used the phrase, “*we faint not.*” This repetition shows that the Apostle is trying to drive home the importance of not getting discouraged in the Lord’s work.

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Paul is explaining how he has been encouraged during turbulent times, and it is essential for others to be encouraged in the same way. This motivation is not because it was his idea or method, but it is the way Jesus revealed to him in order to effectively overcome the adversity of life.

There is no question discouraging times will haunt the passion of the Christian heart. Jesus warned us of tribulation and persecution; these things must, and will, come. The believer is not greater than his Master, if the world hated Christ they will hate those who belong to Him as well. The Christian must withstand the battles with the whole heart intact; a discouraged heart is the unstable heart.

Now, how was Paul encouraged? Look again at verse 16, “...*but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.*” Paul recognized that the outward man (the body) is decaying, or perishing. He also knew outward circumstances can decimate the inclinations of the heart, such that it is easier to give up than to press forward. Paul’s body had been bruised and scarred by many beatings, shipwrecks and imprisonments—all for Christ’s sake. He suffered being hungry, thirsty, cold and without proper clothing to combat the elements. If Paul

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were to focus on his outward circumstances he might just as well give up, but he repudiated this attitude. He knew the inward strength and power that kept him going was the *power of Christ* Himself, and that this strength is renewed everyday by the One who defeated death, hell and the grave.

Paul lived according to the paradox of revelation that the Lord had given to him—Jesus taught,

My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness...

—2 Corinthians 12:9a

We can clearly see that this encouragement from the Lord Jesus was firmly embraced, as he went on to say,

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

—2 Corinthians 12:9b-10

This truth had been impressed to the depths of his heart, to the point he would rather endure difficulties and have the power of Christ resting on him, than to have a

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smooth and trouble free life without the power of Christ. How wonderful the Christian attitude to consider the reproaches of Christ greater riches than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a short time. How far removed we are today from this precious conviction. Alas, it is our tendencies to prefer the presence of abundance and a house of feasting; rather, we should desire to go to the house of need and mourning to properly learn the blessings and strength of the power of Christ. We look at the problems of our day and wring our hands; we hang on to the polished words of our political leaders to quiet our hearts instead of receiving the comfort and wisdom that comes from the One who was dead, but yet lives forevermore. The encouragement and healing we need today only comes from Heaven; we are wrong to look to men for answers. We should never seek from the creature those things that can only be found in the Creator. The idea of looking to the Eternal for our strength, joy and delight becomes more and more foreign as the years roll by. Our generation would do well to digest the candor of the Lord Jesus when He taught,

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

—*Matthew 5:4*

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When we examine the Scriptures with a serious, seeking heart, we will see that the thoughts of God run contrary to the thoughts of men. Trial and tribulation can be endured, and even met with willing determination, when we accept and yield to the truths of Christ and lean on His everlasting arms. The disciples were forewarned that their portion, in the present world, would include being hated and persecuted by friend, foe and family alike for Christ sake, but Jesus promised, *“But there shall not a hair of your head perish. In your patience possess ye your souls”* (Luke 21:18-19).

Dear Christian, we need to look inwardly to that heavenly gift of the indwelling Spirit of Christ that comforts, strengthens and encourages. Did not Christ tell His own that He would send a *“Comforter”* (cf. John 14:15-27)? Our encouragement is to see Him who is invisible to the world. His strength never diminishes, He never slumbers or sleeps, and His love for us is unquenchable and will never die. It is a mistake to look to our own strength and abilities, for the arm of the flesh will fail you every time! In the Old Testament, Moses looked to the unseen, in astonishing fashion, in order to overcome hardship and discouragement that few men have ever experienced. The New Testament book of Hebrews tells us how he did it,

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*“...he endured, as seeing him who is invisible”
(Hebrews 11:27b)*

Just as Moses, Paul found this same power to see the unseen. He took his eyes off the temporary things of today and placed them on eternal things; he walked by faith and not by sight. “*Seeing Him, who is invisible*” presses home the truth that the ever-present, watchful, unseen Eye of the Lord is also upon our present circumstances.

In view of the eternal things, Paul saw his afflictions as a “*light*” thing to him (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17). How many of us would consider beatings, imprisonment and suffering from the lack of basic needs as “*light afflictions?*” No, my friend, they were not “*light*;” what Paul was doing was comparing his suffering with the reward of eternity. When compared with eternity his afflictions were both “*light*” and “*but for a moment.*” Paul presses on in life with spiritual assurance that temporary sufferings will soon be over—even if he had to endure for many years to come. His view was,

*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
—Philippians 1:21*

Paul further develops this truth when he wrote to the Romans,

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For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

—Romans 8:18

How can you shake a man in this spiritual condition? If more of us had this constitution, many psychiatrists would be forced out of business.

The Apostle plainly saw the afflictions that he was enduring as an investment in eternity,

*For our light affliction, which is but a moment, **worketh for us** a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*

—2 Corinthians 4:17

This teaching was based on the blessing (promised by Christ Himself) upon all who would suffer for His sake,

[Jesus said] Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹²Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.

—Matthew 5:11-12

Paul's afflictions were an investment in eternity; his treasure was in Heaven. What a way to view adversity in

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our life—it actually “*works for us*”—if we move forward in the power of Christ. You can be confident that the Lord Jesus will repay every scar, tear and burden that His children have suffered for His namesake. This payment will be in eternal tender “...*where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal*” (Matthew 6:19b). There are no dividends like eternal dividends!

We don’t have to wait for eternity to receive the reward of tribulations endured; there are also positive outcomes of suffering in the present world. The following entry in Romans describes the Christian maturity gained as a result of our trouble,

*And not only so, we glory in tribulations also:
knowing that **tribulation worketh patience;***

⁴And patience, experience; and experience, hope.

—Romans 5:3-4

Paul goes on to proclaim that this experienced renewal was a conscience choice—he said, “*We **look not** at the things which are seen,*” instead, he chose to look on the eternal things “*which are not seen*”. (2 Corinthians 4:18a). You see, this renewal is tied to an act of the will—Christians today need to make such a choice. Every day we are faced with choices, and those choices should be

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made under the guidance of the Holy Spirit as one walking in the light; we should not expect things to just fall into place. Decisions have to be made *daily* to take up our cross and follow Him (cf. Luke 9:23). A mind and heart determined to live for Christ, and do His work, is a mind and heart that refuses to be discouraged.

This message has focused primarily on Paul's experiences in suffering, but we must not neglect to also look to the most obvious and best example of overcoming suffering in this life—none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophet Isaiah told of the earthly plight of the Messiah,

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

No one suffered like Jesus. The Lord lived life with a heavy heart; for He carried our sorrows. The very Fountain of Abundant Life walked the earth as a man rejected and despised; He did not pander to the crowds for popularity. There was much opposition and temptation to hinder the salvation plan that He authored. On the other hand, Jesus had a heart that was also full of

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joy because He came to do the Father's will, and He was focused on that endeavor. It was our salvation that set before the Savior the joy of His soul—such that He endured the cross. The writer to the Hebrews reminds us to consider Jesus, lest we be wearied and faint on our journey,

*Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³**For consider him that endured** such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*

—Hebrews 12:2-3

Jesus is the Author of our faith, He drew salvation's plan and brought it into existence against fierce opposition. He saw the unseen like none other could see it; He knew His kingdom was not of this world, and His place was at the right hand of the Father. He clearly saw man's eternal need, so His work focused beyond the here-and-now. Jesus is also the finisher of our faith, and the work of Christ is not yet complete. Christ has granted to each one who believes the resources and ability to endure opposition and difficulties. Believers today are one with

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His plan and purpose; what He has started will be completed, and He will see us through as the “Finisher” of our faith. There are no boundaries when Christ is supplying the strength, Paul said to the church at Philippi,

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

—*Philippians 4:13*

Jesus knows our plight, sorrows and burdens—He personally experienced each one. Our High Priest has been touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and He understands like no other what each of us go through in this life. Looking to Jesus is the key to encouragement, “*Lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.*” When we look to Jesus, we are looking toward eternity, and this faithful view will help us to move forward in the Lord’s work—no matter the cost; no matter the discomfort; no matter the sacrifice; no matter the sorrow.

The following words of the Lord Jesus provide a reality check and a reassuring promise, when we are faced with difficulty while walking the narrow way,

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

—*John 16:33b*

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Trouble is a guarantee in our lives; it is promised, just as Heaven itself is promised to the redeemed. That trouble, no matter how great, is just a reminder of our identification with Him. As Paul exclaimed to the Philippians,

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death

—*Philippians 3:10*

Fellowship with Jesus Christ consists not in just the glorious and magnificent, but also in the shame of the world. We all understand the fullness received when praising and worshiping Him, we know the satisfaction of serving Him, but do we really understand and know how to suffer with Him? Knowing Christ is to know sorrow and grief over sin; knowing Christ is to be persecuted; knowing Christ is to be despised and rejected by the world. Yet, with that bitter fellowship, we have a sympathetic Companion in which we receive consolation,

For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

—*2 Corinthians 1:5*

With every stripe, scar, hurt, and need we have suffered on account of Jesus, He will be there to

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administer the balm to heal the wound so that we may press on and not lose heart. For the wounds of the body—He is the great Physician who heals through prayer and faith. For the wounds of the mind—He is the Wonderful Counselor who is pure, easy to be intreated, gentle, peaceable, loves mercy, and in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The believer has a Shepherd that leads His sheep to those green pastures and still waters of rest, so that the soul can be restored over and over again. Jesus has overcome the world, in the most victorious way, which is shared with His sheep. To know Christ is to know life, real life, even resurrected, incorruptible, undefiled and abundant life!

The Scriptures enlighten us that encouragement can be found within the heartaches and sufferings in the eye of the eternal. For now, we see eternity through a dark glass, but what we can see awakens our heart to be steadfast in our labor for Christ, and to grow in His grace and knowledge.

Oh, that we may have a ready and willing part in His sufferings, and know the power of His resurrection! ☩→

TEARS IN A BOTTLE

*Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into
thy bottle: are they not in thy book?*

—*Psalm 56:8*



There are many opportunities to shed tears in life, it is a common trait that all the sons and daughters of Adam share. Tears are an inevitable reaction to times of agony and affliction; heartache and hardship; misery and mourning; sadness and suffering, along with trial and tribulation. Occasionally, tears are shed during moments of other intense emotions—like joy and anger. In most cultures of the world, tears are most associated with babies, children and women; it is typically not considered socially acceptable for men to cry. Nonetheless, despite your culture, age or gender, tears bind us together like nothing else.

We can sympathize with another's loss and tragedy because we can identify with their needs. So, it stands to reason if we can sympathize with one another, how much more can He who created us and came from Heaven's

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glory to walk the earth in human flesh, sympathize with the fountain of the aching heart and soul of man? Just as He has the very hairs of our head numbered and knows when every sparrow falls, He knows and remembers our tears, even the secret tears you and I have shed. Not one tear drop on your pillow has gone unnoticed on High. It is with good reason the prophets of old foretold that the long-awaited, promised Messiah was going to come and “...*bind up the brokenhearted*” (Isaiah 61:1).

The writer of our featured verse was the very famous shepherd boy, musician and king, David. He penned these words in a state of worry and discouragement while he was amongst his enemies. David’s very life hung in the balance, being oppressed and afraid, yet assured in his heart that God knew his situation. David admits here that he shed tears, and if you are familiar with David, you know he was a man’s man. He is the one who, as a youth, slew the Philistine giant named Goliath while all of Israel’s bravest men of war refused to take on the precarious task (cf. 1 Sam. 17). Still, David asked the Lord to remember his tears by putting them in a “*bottle*,” and have them written in a “*book*.” David’s example here tells us that even the giants of the faith struggle with the sorrows of life. It is quite biblical to ask God to remember our sorrow and tears.

TEARS IN A BOTTLE

In a contrasting thought, we do well to remember the tears of the Lord Jesus Christ as He wept at the tomb of His friend, Lazarus. The people remarked as they observed, “*Behold how he loved him*” (John 11:36). Undeniably, our Savior was “*moved with compassion*” on many occasions when He saw the great need of man as “*sheep scattered which had no shepherd*” (Matthew 9:36). We simply cannot forget the Lord Jesus lamenting over Jerusalem, because men loved darkness rather than light,

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets,
and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often
would I have gathered thy children together, even as
a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye
would not!*

—*Matthew 23:37*

In these words we can sense the intensity and depth of the love of Almighty God for man. It is easy to forget that the tears God sheds for us are just as real as our tears. The One who created man capable of shedding tears, knows all too well about them. Let not this great truth get by us! The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, had a harsh message from Heaven to deliver to the nation of Israel, but he did so with tear stained cheeks. It is my firm belief that the tears of Jeremiah, just as the tears of

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Jesus, were the very tears of the great *I AM*. We may need to ask ourselves,

“Do we remember God’s tears? Do we live like we remember His tender, compassionate heart for us?”

Sometimes, I think our heart should break for Him!

Nevertheless, there is no reason for us to wonder whether God will remember our tears. We have been given the great privilege to see (through written prophecy) how God will handle His remembrance of our “tears in a bottle.” If we look into the book of Revelation, we see a glimpse of God’s plan for His children which will come to pass in the future,

*And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. **4And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;** and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*

—Revelation 21:3-4

David’s request in Psalm 56:8 has, without a doubt, been granted; the tears of man are remembered on High.

TEARS IN A BOTTLE

Not only are they remembered, we are told that our tears will be wiped away by God Himself. The yearning of man to have his innermost wounds healed is so vastly important to God, that He will not delegate this tender task. John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrims Progress* said,

“God puts our tears in a bottle so that one day He can wipe them away.”

With the Eye of Scripture we can see very clearly that this is a true and wonderful statement. How can it be said any better or simpler? What a soft pillow for a burdened and heavy heart.

For now, the tears continue to flow, but we do not sorrow as those who have no hope. We look for a better, heavenly country, “...*a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (2 Corinthians 5:1). Presently, there will be plenty of weeping, but we have been promised a joy that is unspeakable in the world to come. In our earthly pilgrimage, we are directed to always look unto Jesus who is the Author and Finisher of our faith. We confess His name before men as our Savior, we trust in His blood for forgiveness of sin, we have strength and confidence in His abiding presence through His resurrection, and we have the resources to live a sober and holy life through His indwelling Spirit.

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What a wonderful opportunity we have to be a witness to the world, even in the sorrowful course of life. Our trouble and tears seem to be a training ground that equips us to comfort others. How wasteful our tears are if they are not used to make the pathway of someone else just a little brighter. The folks of Corinth were encouraged in this way in the following passage,

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; ⁴Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

—2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Those who shed tears in faith declare plainly to the world that they **believe**, and know with assurance that God has put their “tears in a bottle.” The tears of the redeemed (which are many) are tenderly kept in God’s storage in preparation of the final victory, which will not only do away with the tears, but also those offenses which caused them in the first place. These offenses will become “*former things*” that will pass away, and be remembered no more. Let every time our eyes melt remind us of this very precious truth. ☞

THE VOICE OF THANKSGIVING

I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar, O LORD: ⁷That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works. ⁸LORD, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.

—*Psalm 26:6-8*



While searching through Webster's dictionary for an acceptable definition of the word "thanks," I met with disappointment. I found that Mr. Webster defined "thanks" as "*gratitude*"—okay—so now I look up the word "*gratitude*"—it was defined as "*thanks.*" This disappointment led to the desperate measure of making up my own definition (as scary as that may seem); here are my thoughts,

"Thanks is a condition of heart that expresses a favorable and kind attitude toward one who has made provision for a need."

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I don't know if this definition satisfies you, but I do think we can all agree that being thankful is truly a *condition of heart*, and this condition will manifest itself in the daily life. For the genuine definition of "thanksgiving" we would do well to turn away from Mr. Webster's (and my own) weak efforts, and to the Scriptures.

Psalm 26:1-3 gives an introduction to the truest definition of what thanksgiving to God really is all about. The man expressing his heart in this psalm has seen and experienced the loving-kindness of the LORD in his life, and he is grateful to the innermost of his being. So deep is this passion, that his life has become a living testimony of what the LORD has done for him. Read the passionate cries of a heart full of gratitude to the LORD,

Judge me, O LORD; for I have walked in mine integrity: I have trusted also in the LORD; therefore I shall not slide. ²Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. ³For thy lovingkindness is before mine eyes: and I have walked in thy truth.

—*Psalm 26:1-3*

What is the proper response of a man who has received mercy from the LORD? Should he double, or

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triple his giving to the poor and needy in his community? Should he vow to become a preacher? Should he prepare a bountiful thanksgiving feast? Should he invite all his friends over for a prayer meeting? While, in some cases, some or all of these things may ultimately be the by-product of a heart full of thanksgiving, but the basic biblical response of thanksgiving to the LORD is to simply **walk in His truth** (cf. Psa. 26:3b). For it is in this walk we can clearly hear the *“voice of thanksgiving.”*

How many of us—at this very moment—would cry out to God in this fashion? He is asking God to “*examine*” and “*prove*” his heart. This man has obeyed the call of God and has trusted the way in which God has revealed. It is a life that desires to be in the “*light*.” Is it not true that the rightful dwelling place for the saints is in the “*light*” (cf. Col. 1:12)? This is the experience of the Christian that is walking in close fellowship with the Lord; this attitude is supported in the teachings of Christ when He said,

For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.
²¹***But he that doeth truth cometh to the light,*** *that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.*

—John 3:20-21

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Notice verse 6 of our focal Scripture where the psalmist (who happens to be David) says, “*I will wash mine hands in innocency: so will I compass thine altar.*” In this verse, we see that he was eager to worship the LORD, he wanted to be in His house and he wanted to be where the LORD was honored. This life is a prepared life, to not only worship, but is the backdrop for David to “...*publish with the **voice of thanksgiving** and tell of all [of God’s] wondrous works*” (Psalm 26:7).

This voice was a sincere voice; a voice that was backed up by a holy life; a voice that had experienced God’s love; a voice that could tell of the stability of God’s Word and a voice that could praise the LORD with no hesitation. Many Bible teachers have referred to this kind of life as a life of “thanks-living.” I think that is a pretty accurate observation.

This psalm instructs us that giving thanks to God involves so much more than merely saying a prayer over a meal, or attending a thanksgiving church service. Thanksgiving to God is a way of life; a life that has sought God’s face; a life that serves God with the whole heart. This way is the way of walking in the light; a way that seeks examination and approval of God Himself. It is the way of love, truth and worship. This kind of life is a voice or expression; it is a proclamation that begs

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listeners and speaks loud and clear to all who are within its reach. It is a voice that tells the world that God is alive, well, and moving in the hearts of men and women. It is the “*voice of thanksgiving*” that tells all who would hear that Jesus is able to build you up, and give an inheritance to all who are sanctified in Him.

We also see in these verses that the thankful life is the witnessing life, as David says that he tells of God’s “*wondrous works*” (Psalm 26:7b). Many evangelicals seek the best method for “witnessing,” but the Word clearly teaches the best way to witness for God is to be thankful and live for Him. When we live with thanksgiving in our hearts the fruit of sharing Christ and His gospel will naturally flow out of the heart—it will be a continual thing. This type of living will put your lamp on its lamp stand to “*give light to all who are in the house*” (cf. Matt. 5:15b). We are told to,

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

—*Matthew 5:16*

Holy living is something that is not very popular to preach, many a preacher has learned that you will not draw a large crowd when a holy life is being emphasized

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from the pulpit. No matter its popularity, it is the way in which God directs—“*Let God be true but every man a liar*” (cf. Romans 3:4). The soul that truly believes in the sacred promises will want God’s approval, will want to worship Him and will testify to others of His wonderful loving-kindness. This is the true definition of thanksgiving, and it all begins to be expressed by humbly walking in the truth.

Let this psalm direct you and me into what it really means to be thankful to God. If a heart has truly come into the presence of Jesus Christ, the life will accomplish one of the noblest acts of the Christian—and that is to communicate to the world the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord. No other means of communication sounds as loud and as clear than when the sacred message is given with the “*voice of thanksgiving.*” ❧

THE PRINCE OF PEACE

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and
his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The
mighty God, The everlasting Father, **The Prince
of Peace.***

—Isaiah 9:6

*And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude
of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and **on earth
peace, good will toward men.***

—Luke 2:13, 14



Many Christmas carols tell of the miraculous story of Jesus' birth. Some carols emphasize the joy and rejoicing of the herald angels in the fields outside of Bethlehem. Select carols invite the Faithful to come and adore Him; still others ask questions to make us think through the message of Christmas. The seasonal favorite, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*, falls into this latter category. The words from this carol came

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from the pen of Henry W. Longfellow on Christmas Day, 1864. This carol, which was originally penned as a poem titled, *Christmas Bells*, was written during the American Civil War. The passion of the words came from a heart that had experienced tragedy, as Mr. Longfellow had endured the death of his wife and the crippling injury of his son; both due to the hostilities of the war. With the despair of war all about him, Mr. Longfellow thought long and hard about the message of peace at Christmastime. The words most recalled of this hymn are those of the first verse,

*I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

The carol has an interesting third verse, it goes like this,

*And in despair I bowed my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men."*

These words seem shocking (for a Christmas carol) when considering them independently. Certainly, as we look around at our world today, the thought of peace and

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good will seem foreign to a large extent. Life can be very discouraging, and can lead a man or woman into despondency. The biblical, peaceful message of Christmas that is heard from year-to-year does seem mocked, even questionable. Such thoughts can lead us to throw up our hands at Christmas and say, “What’s the use?” The paradox of peace is absolutely real and worthy of our thoughts and examination.

So which is it?—the message of Bethlehem?—or the reality that we oftentimes perceive in the world? Do we find ourselves in the same dilemma as the author of, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*? Is it possible that once we come out of the wide-eyed children’s’ world of Christmas, and into the stark reality of daily adult life, that we stagger at the great Message delivered to common peasants and royalty alike?

Peace on earth is a great desire of the human heart, and I hurry to say that it is something well within our grasp—even at this very moment. Alas, many define peace only on their own terms, which is typically in the obvious scope of “absence of war or other aggression,” instead of considering the Scriptural view of how God is moving in this area. In order to answer the great question of peace

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we must look to the Author of peace. Let's look at peace in Scripture, as well as the role the *Prince of Peace* plays.

PEACE WITH GOD

First of all, the Bible speaks of “*peace with God.*” This is the peace experienced when the Prince of Peace enters the heart, by faith, to justify a sinner before a Holy God:

*Therefore being justified by faith, we have **peace with God** through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

—Romans 5:1

Being “*justified*” in God’s sight is where peace ultimately starts; if one does not possess this peace, despair will ultimately prevail. The realization that all of mankind is in rebellion against God goes against the arrogant nature of man; however, this is a truth in which we all must face-up to—if we are to have peace:

*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were **enemies**, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*

—Romans 5:10

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*Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, **be ye reconciled to God.***²¹ *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.*

—2 Corinthians 5:20–21

One of the great words of Scripture is “*reconciliation*,” which is a word that, in-part, describes the work of salvation. This word expresses that God has made provision that our adversarial relationship with Him may be remedied. One may say, “I am not an adversary of God,” but the Bible clearly teaches that we (in our natural condition) are *enemies* of God. Indeed, the Scriptures teach that if any be a “*...friend of the world, is the enemy of God*” (James 4:4b); such a relationship needs reconciliation. In this conciliatory plan, God has demonstrated His “*good will toward men*” in the giving of His Son as a sacrifice for sin; this truth is what the entire Christmas story is all about. Through Jesus, God is reconciled with man, but the question is,

“Are we reconciled with God?”

God has reached out to man and is ready and willing to warm our hearts with peace today, but this biblical peace is conditional, and contingent on our relationship with

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the Lord Jesus Christ. It is only through Him, and His saving work, that peace is possible in our hearts.

THE PEACE OF GOD

Secondly, the Bible teaches us about, “*The peace of God.*” This is the day-by-day inward peace that is maintained in a world full of discord by the Prince of Peace. This Prince lives and reigns in the heart that has been reconciled and justified. This inward peace is the entitlement of the heart in which Christ has entered by faith, and, through prayer, has submitted all the cares of this life to Christ with thanksgiving. The apostle Paul wrote this great admonition to the believers in Philippi,

*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. ⁷And **the peace of God**, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

—*Philippians 4:6-7*

Notice that this peace “*passes all understanding;*” this is the kind of peace the Lord gives in a world full of trouble. The world does not understand the concept of one who can be caught in the midst of war, but yet find peace. Even those of the narrow way of Christ are amazed as we experience the cords of Christ’s love incapacitating the

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pangs of conflict—spiritual and otherwise. After teaching His disciples about the coming of the Holy Spirit (whom He referred to as the *Comforter*), Christ very tenderly taught,

*These things I have spoken unto you, that **in me ye might have peace**. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.*

—*John 16:33*

Overcoming the world is not something we can manufacture on our own; it is a product of the Christ of God, who is the stable Rock which is greater than the instability of the world.

PEACE ON EARTH

Lastly, the Bible teaches (in the prophetic books) that the Prince of Peace will bring “*peace on earth*,” when He returns in “*great power and glory*” (cf. Matt. 13:26). In His first advent, He came as Savior; in His second advent, He will come as Judge to put down all sin and iniquity to make way for peace. It is a great biblical truth that evil and sin will have to be forcefully extracted from reality; it will not just go away. The godly will be separated from the ungodly; the good separated from the evil; the filthy

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separated from the holy, and all sin separated from righteousness. The only Personality qualified to make such distinctions, and provide the spiritual force to accomplish such a task, is the One who is called Faithful and True, the Word of God, even King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Read the prophecy of Rev. 19:11-16,

And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. ¹² His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. ¹³ And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Through our own justice system, we see a foreshadowing of God's justice in our daily society. In

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order for our present day-to-day life to have a semblance of peace, stability and tranquility, we must separate those who would wreak havoc and do harm from the general population, which is accomplished through the use of the prison system. Human government used for the purpose of keeping order was not mans' idea, it is the plan that has been orchestrated from Heaven going back to—at least—Noah's day. This simple truth is ignored by multitudes today when eternity is considered. It makes sense that if the consequences of sin can be feared in mans' system, we can say with deep conviction, *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"* (Hebrews 10:31).

The final war will ultimately result in the absolute destruction of that Wicked One which deceived the whole world—along with all whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life. The cursed old creation will then give way to the new creation where death, sorrow, pain, tears and crying are all passed away—then, eternal peace:

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away...

—Revelation 21:1a

And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh

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*abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are
written in the Lamb's book of life.*

—Revelation 21:27

Is it a world filled with sin and shame?—Yes. Is it a world filled with discord and war?—Yes. Do we feel the inner conflict raging in our own soul?—Yes. In spite of these obvious observations, the great truth that God is moving and working in our world today has been abundantly pressed upon our hearts through faith, and the ever abiding presence of the Spirit of God. Mr. Longfellow must have not only known this truth, but had experienced it as well. Read the words which flowed from a hopeful heart into the wonderful fourth verse of the great, inspiring carol in which we began our message,

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men."*

The peace that we have considered rests upon the shoulder of the One who carried the cross, the One named the Prince of Peace. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

✠

THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME OF THE YEAR

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and
his name shall be called **Wonderful**, Counsellor,
The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The
Prince of Peace*

—Isaiah 9:6



Years ago, the American entertainer, Andy Williams, recorded a Christmas song titled, *It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*. In this song, Mr. Williams touts that the Christmas season will bring,

“Parties for hosting, marshmallows for toasting and
caroling out in the snow”

“There'll be scary ghost stories and tales of the
glories of Christmas' long, long ago.”

These and other such activities—the song says—will make Christmas wonderful. I certainly do not disagree with the suggestion of this song, but the more I thought

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about what makes Christmas wonderful, I began to whittle down in my own heart and mind what really are the basic elements of what makes Christmas “the most wonderful time of the year.” To put it simply, I found the reason to be due to the One named “*WONDERFUL*” (cf. Isa. 9:6). Now, just how does Jesus directly impact our lives where we notice the specialness of the season? I believe there are two simple reasons; here is the first,

THE NAME OF JESUS IS PRAISED

The Christmas season is the one time of year the name of Jesus Christ is lauded, heralded and honored like no other. I have noticed that several of the secular radio stations in the Raleigh, N.C. area are playing Christmas hymns and carols, along with the “ho, ho, ho” and “jingle bell” songs during the month of December. Any other time of year that Holy Name is shunned and is considered too controversial for the main stream. I was amazed as I heard the great carol, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, playing on one of Raleigh’s biggest radio stations. This carol is rich in Bible doctrine, such as: the virgin birth, the resurrection, reconciliation of sinners, and the incarnation—just to name a few. How many times during the year would a secular radio station give its air time to the “*good tidings of great joy*,” that is the “*power of God*”

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unto salvation to everyone who believes” (cf. Romans 1:16)? It is almost unthinkable that Jesus would be granted such attention in the public arena in this day and age, and we should rejoice in it.

The Bible tells us that it is good to praise the Lord (cf. Psalm 147:1). Praise of Christ brings a wonderful release to the heart. Somehow, it seems that burdens fly away from the weary and downtrodden when the name of the Lord is praised. It is decidedly the most wonderful time of year when—if but for a few weeks—the testimony of Jesus and the resurrection reaches ears that may otherwise be stopped to such a message.

In an indirect way, the home Christmas decorations and displays also praise the name of Christ. Even the most reserved personality, who are very timid about declaring their faith at other times of the year, are bold enough to proudly display nativity scenes, angels, and the Star the wise men followed to that poor dwelling in Bethlehem. What a wonder is Christmastime!

A GIVING SPIRIT

The second reason I feel Christmas is the most wonderful time is that people tend to open their hearts a

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little more to a giving spirit, resulting in a renewed interest in the poor and needy. The Bible teaches us that,

*...so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is **more blessed to give** than to receive.*

—*Acts 20:35b*

The blessings that come to ones' heart as a result of giving to the needy cannot be bought in any store and is not for sale; it is a special gift from Christ Himself. The heart that has been touched with a blessing has been touched with a medication that only Heaven can give. This blessing lifts the spirit of man, because with such giving, "*God is well pleased*" (cf. Hebrews 13:16).

I know you may be thinking,

"Christmas is so commercialized, and all the stores are just after your money."

There is no question about this, and I would never argue that point. In spite of this, many who are shopping are shopping for someone else and their thoughts and intents are to meet a need in another person's life; they are striving to make a loved one happy. In doing this, many sacrifice their own wants and needs to receive the blessing that only comes from Heaven. When this spirit

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of Christmas overcomes the heart, the words of Christ begin to be understood in the reality that we can lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven (cf. Matthew 6:20). This attitude of giving is a portion of the attitude of Christ Himself,

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 Corinthians 8:9

What a medicine for the heart when folks obey God's Word and esteem others better than themselves. Christmas is a confirmation of the great beatitude that says,

"Blessed are the meek..." (Matthew 5:5a).

The blessings received from bestowing the love of Christ upon others is a mere foretaste of that better day that Jesus will usher in—when He comes again to the Earth in great power and glory. Long live Christmastime!

Alas, all too often, when Christmas is over, the praises of the name of Christ, along with the spirit of giving and caring for others are put away with the decorations; not to be retrieved again until next year. So, why not make

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these two elements of Christmas a part of our lives year round? It could be that the power of the gospel might find our hearts to be a conduit of God's love to the world around us—all 365 days a year. Many of the problems of our hearts would disappear and be replaced with love, peace, gentleness, patience and sincerity—which are wonderful fruits given to His children, by the One named "*Wonderful.*" ❧

REVEALING, DEALING AND HEALING

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. ⁸And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.

—Genesis 3:7-8



Ever since the great deception in the Garden of Eden led to the great conception of sin in the human family, man has fled from God in fear, hid himself, and attempted to cover his shame by his own devices. This is the natural response of a man in sin when confronted with the presence of Almighty God. Actually, biblical fear of God is an emotion that is desired in man; the Bible defines the “right” kind of fear in Proverbs 9:10,

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*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom:
and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.*

This kind of *fear* is the recognition of God's authority and power over us as our Creator, Master and Lord; it is a fear that reverences our accountability to Him, and dreads His wrath. Biblical "*fear*" is the beginning of our "*knowledge of the holy*," and is the basis for the "*understanding*" of the things of God, especially those things that pertain to our redemption and sanctification. For how can a man ever be saved if there is no respect, reverence, and even fear at the thought of being in the presence of the One who is our Judge, and has "... *eyes like unto a flame of fire ...*" (cf. Rev. 1:14b)?

Conviction of the looming judgment to come is the aspect of the "*knowledge of the holy*" that is not pleasant to contemplate, but we must consider the affirmations of this truth in Scripture,

- *For our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:29).*
- *But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men (2 Peter 3:7).*

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- *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31).*
- *“... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, ⁸In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁹Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7b-9).*

Even if man is hesitant to admit it—each and every heart knows, deep down, that the truth of God’s judgment hangs over all of creation. This “understanding” gives good reason for a man—living in sin—to be in fear and hide himself.

Our “*knowledge of the holy*” must not stop at God’s wrath upon sin, it must continue on to the tender hearted, compassionate nature of God which reaches out to man with the remedy to restore His creatures back to Himself. Biblical fear of God is tempered with the revealed knowledge of God as,

... good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon [him].

—*Psalm 86:5b*

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While God will one day pour out His wrath, He is “*slow to anger and full of compassion*” (cf. Psalm 145:8). We rest hard on the great proclamation of Jesus that says,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

—*John 3:16-17*

This knowledge of God’s character gives man, who is weak, fallible and sinful, a confidence to come to the throne of grace so that God can deal with his sin and iniquity in His prescribed manner which loves mercy. It is in this graceful way we find the Lord walking in the Garden in the cool and peacefulness of the day, calling out to fearful man in the third chapter of Genesis.

THE HIDING

After Adam and Eve’s transgression, they immediately “... *hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God ...*” (Gen. 3:8b). This initial reaction to hide from God’s presence is the natural reaction for a man who is under condemnation. I am sure that, before sin occurred, Adam and Eve came running to Him when they heard His loving Voice stirring in the Garden; how different it

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was when they rebelled against Him; how sad it was that this relationship was disturbed. This situation serves as a real-life demonstration of how sin severs our relationship with our Creator. Read how the New Testament describes this sad condition of man,

- “...*loved darkness rather than light*” (John 3:19).
- “...*dead in trespasses and sins.*” (Eph. 2:1).
- And the word, “*Lost*” (ref. Luke 19:10, 2 Corinthians 4:3).

These tragic expressions are an illustration of our condition that separates us from God; as a result, we are,

- In “*darkness,*” and need to be called into the “*light.*”
- “*Dead,*” and need to be “*quicken,*” or made alive.
- “*Lost,*” and need to be “*saved.*”

The truths of Scripture establish mans’ needs very clearly; yet, all too often, we are too proud to admit that clearly defined need.

The “wrong” kind of “*fear of the Lord*” keeps man in hiding from His presence. This kind of fear is stubborn, and displays unbelief in God’s kind, loving and merciful

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nature, and rejects the remedy that only He can provide. Could it be, that it is this “wrong” kind of fear that leads the list of sins of those who perish?

*But the **fearful**, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*

—Revelation 21:8

When a man stays in hiding and refuses to come into the light, he reveals his hate for the Light and love for the darkness. The folly of it all is that he thinks the darkness allows him to do evil with impunity. Jesus said,

For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

—John 3:20

Adam and Eve feared God’s presence after the transgression. This is the place we all find ourselves when living a life of habitual sin. When this happens, we will have no desire for the things of God, no desire to attend church, pray or read our Bibles. We no longer come running when He calls us to prayer and worship, nor are we motivated and energized when He calls us to

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good works. Dear friend, if we are exhibiting these symptoms in our life right now, it is a tell-tale sign that something is vastly wrong spiritually. Our relationship with the Savior has been disturbed, and it is time to come back into the Light.

THE CALLING

Providentially, God steps into Adam and Eve's situation by first calling out to man—calling out to man who is *“lost”* in sin—calling out to man who is in *“darkness”*—calling out to man who is *“dead in sin.”*

And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? ¹⁰And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

—*Genesis 3:9-10*

This act of God, whereby we find Him calling and searching for man, lays down a great biblical foundation that is precious,

It is always God who first seeks and calls man out of hiding in the darkness, and deadness of sin.

This great truth, which began in the book of Genesis, also runs throughout the New Testament,

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- *[Jesus said] “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you ...” (John 15:16a)*
- *“But ye are a chosen generation ...” (1 Peter 2:9a)*
- *“... that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light:” (1 Peter 2:9b)*
- *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost (Luke 19:10).*
- *And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he [made alive] together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; (Colossians 2:13)*
- *Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God (1 Thessalonians 1:4).*
- *“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began ...” (2 Timothy 1:9)*

A tender, simple synopsis of this “divine election” of man is given in 1 John 4:19,

We love Him, because He first loved us.

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If the task of seeking God were left to mans' desire, the entire human race would never have a chance.

God's calling to man brings us to the realization that the first step toward being "reconciled" with God is to just **come to Him**—come just as we are, sin and all! Our first and foremost responsibility is to merely respond to the call. Read the tender invitations from the Lord,

- *Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Isaiah 1:18).*
- *Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else (Isaiah 45:22).*
- *"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters ..." (Isaiah 55:1)*
- *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).*
- *Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink (John 7:37).*

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- *All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out (John 6:37).*
- *And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Revelation 22:17).*

Have you ever known such an affectionate summons? This is not a call of a punitive nature, this is not a call of condemnation; this is a call of grace that shows that God has not given up on His children. This is a call that expresses a desire for a relationship with His wayward creatures and says,

“I have the medicine to cure your disease; I want to care for you and heal your wounds.”

The sheer goodness that we find in the nature of God should lead us to step into the light of repentance, and faith in a wonderful Savior. Take comfort that we have a searching, seeking God who loves us.

The invitation of God teaches us that the wretched man must be dragged out of the darkness into the light, so that sins are **revealed** and subsequently confessed. There has to be reasoning together with God (cf. Isaiah

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1:18) concerning our transgressions against Him, much like being the defendant in a court case who has a pile of evidence stacked up against him. Once we are convicted of our sin, and the sentence of judgment is felt in our very soul, we acknowledge our guilt and make an appeal to His mercy for salvation—this is referred to as confessing our sins,

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

—1 John 1:9

We are not to hide; it is pointless to hide from a sovereign, omnipotent, omnipresent Being who has every hair of our head numbered. We simply need to come into the Light, agree with God, and admit that we are guilty as charged. We are told that, “*Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*” (Hebrews 4:13). What we think is well hidden now, will be revealed in the future:

[Jesus said] For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.

—Luke 12:2

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The message of God's kind and loving nature should beckon us by His merciful side, but many refuse the invitation to "*come*" because of pride, self sufficiency, love of the temporary pleasures that darkness and sin provide, and maybe even just simple, rank unbelief.

THE COVER-UP

Notice the other thing that Adam and Eve did—they covered themselves with fig leaves. Our first parents knew that a covering was necessary because they were naked; their shame was exposed to, not only themselves, but to God Himself. They had lost their innocence, their consciences were awakened to their fallen state; therefore, they were absolutely right in realizing they needed a covering. Their error was in the method of attempting to cover themselves with their own efforts. Again, this is the common reaction of the natural man when he is in sin. These same efforts manifest themselves today, not in sewing fig leaves, but by piecing together the worldly facade of religious rituals, doing good deeds, philanthropy, and even joining a church. I hasten to say, there is nothing wrong with any of these activities, but the Bible clearly teaches that they will not atone for sin in a person's heart and soul. This type of covering merely makes the "*outside of the cup clean,*" while the inside is absolutely filthy—this system is adamantly condemned by

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the Lord Jesus (cf. Luke 11:37-52). The prophet Isaiah tells us that the meager righteousness we may possess, in our natural state, is as “*filthy rags*” in the sight of the Lord (cf. Isa. 64:6). The idea of man offering God his own righteousness, as a covering, has about as much foundation as a house of sand that a child built on the sea shore—with the longevity to match! Thankfully, God has a much different plan—a plan which is eternally effectual.

When the Bible speaks of sins being covered, it is speaking of being covered from the consequences of the broken Law of God. It is not necessarily hid from Him who is omniscient, but God willingly and justly places it out of His sight; He remembers it no more (cf. Heb. 8:12), and it is placed as far as the East is from the West (cf. Psalm 103:12). The effectual, authentic, God given covering will produce a blessing in the life of a person that comes with sins being forgiven:

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose
sin is covered.*

—*Psalm 32:1*

This covering, however, cannot be something produced by the works of men, “*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law*” (Galatians 2:16a). God would have to provide the covering. God wasted no time

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in removing the fig leaves and providing clothing for His prodigal children. Notice that while the fig leaves were probably more attractive and less trouble to employ, God chose coats of skin as their covering,

*Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD
God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

—*Genesis 3:21*

You see, the fig leaf covering did not require the shedding of blood. The coats of skin required, not only the shedding of blood, but death—for “*the wages of sin is death*” (Romans 6:23a). This is the first mention of substitutionary sacrifice in the Scripture, which teaches us that blood had to be shed in order that mans’ sin and shame be covered, atoned for, even forgiven. The great axiom of blood atonement is laid down in the book of Leviticus,

*For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have
given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement
for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an
atonement for the soul.*

—*Leviticus 17:11*

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Hebrews 9:22b removes all doubt concerning the role blood plays in God's work in the covering and forgiving of sins,

"... without shedding of blood is no remission."

Mans' attempt at covering his own sin was a complete failure, and the time and effort spent to manufacture that covering utterly futile, and not recognized by God in the least. This should be a great lesson to those of us living in contemporary times, but despite the old story, men continue to sew fig leaves together. The shedding of blood is considered by many to be offensive and not aesthetically pleasing, but sin is offensive and not aesthetically pleasing to the Lord. It is interesting to note that the only tree that was cursed by the Lord Jesus, during his earthly ministry, was the fig tree (cf. Mark 11:13-14).

THE QUALIFICATION OF THE SACRIFICE

It is expressly taught in the New Testament that the *"blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin"* (Hebrews 10:4). So, how does this mesh with the situation in the Garden? As a general rule of Bible study, I always use the New Testament as the answer key of the Old Testament. What is taught in the Old Testament by "type" (which is

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a symbol with a prophetic element), is often clearly revealed in the New Testament. This is one way God has chosen to meter His revelation to man, and this method is what we have at work with the Old Testament sacrifices. The sacrifices of the Old Testament were a “type” of the true Sacrifice.

The Bible teaches that the sacrifices of old only pointed to the One who was to come, in whom was a fit and capable sacrifice, who had the power to adequately atone for the sin of man. This perfect Sacrifice would provide each believer a covering that is described as “...*fine linen, white and clean*” (Rev. 19:14b). This teaching, which God unveiled in the Garden, is the initial unveiling of gospel truth. Gospel truth did not begin with the birth of Christ in Bethlehem; it began in the Garden of Eden. This great doctrine is God’s method of **dealing** with sin.

Down through the centuries, the thread of this precious truth was further revealed in the life of the nation Israel. Some of the most notable are the events leading to the Exodus from Egypt, as the Israelites had to sacrifice the Passover lamb to be spared by the death angel. The Lord said at that time,

“... when I see the blood, I will pass over you ...”

—Exodus 12:13b

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The thread of revelation continued in “type” with the building of the Tabernacle with all of its sacrifices and ceremonies, with which many were perpetuated in the Temple. All uncertainty is removed as to what these sacrifices meant when John the Baptist enters the scene, points to Jesus, and says,

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

—*John 1:29b*

This is the answer key that I spoke of earlier. This truth teaches us that Jesus Christ is the true sacrifice that the Father in Heaven has provided for sin. Jesus is the One who fulfills all the “types” and symbols of the Old Testament as God’s provided covering, which re-establishes our relationship with Him. After Jesus arose from the dead, we immediately find Him using the Old Testament to teach His disciples, “*And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*” (Luke 24:27). Jesus, John the Baptist, and the Apostles taught these very precious gospel truths out of the Old Testament.

It is fascinating that the New Testament actually refers to those who have been “*saved*” as if they have been

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covered by putting on a garment, and that garment is Christ,

For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

—Galatians 3:27

The covering of Christ is a robe of righteousness that will become apparent when our earthly time is over, so that we would not stand before Him in our naked sin and shame, but in the righteousness of Christ,

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: ³If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

—2 Corinthians 5:1-3

There is a situation recorded in the Gospel of Mark, where a young man was with the disciples at the arrest of Jesus. Apparently, this young man was also restrained, but managed to pull free and escape by slipping out of the linen that was covering his body,

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And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: ⁵²And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.

—Mark 14:51-52

I have often wondered why the Scripture was so clear on emphasizing that the linen was his only covering, and that he was naked underneath. It is possible, that this is recorded as a living allegory in connection with the teaching that Christ is our only covering. Scriptural truth is clear in revealing that if we flee from Jesus, we will flee “*naked*,” and will stand before Him in shame.

IMPUTATION

This God provided covering not only puts away sin, but “imputes” the righteousness of Christ to the believer. This word “impute” is a word that is related to keeping financial records (i.e., adding to, or taking away from an account). Paul deals with this subject extensively in the fourth chapter of Romans, quoting the Holy Spirit inspired writing of King David, regarding the blessedness of being justified apart from works:

Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness

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without works, ⁷Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

—Romans 4:6-8

When one is “*in Christ*,” we are joined to Christ such that all the merit that belongs to Him is ours also. On the negative side of the ledger, our sin was “imputed” to Christ on the cross and judged in our stead. In truth, our salvation is subtraction and addition. Our debt of sin is subtracted, and the righteousness of Christ is added to our account. This is the only righteousness that we will have to stand on when we are face-to-face with the Father one day, and when we stand “*in Christ*” we stand **faultless** before Him who lives forever and ever (cf. Jude 1:24). This doctrine of imputation is spelled out very simply in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

For he hath made [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

THE SAVING WORK

Forgiveness of sin is indeed a work—not a work man can do—but a work only God can do for us. The animal blood spilled in the Garden of Eden, and during that first

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Passover in Egypt, as well as on the altars of the Tabernacle and the Temple were a “type” of the real, effectual blood which was shed by the very Son of God. This blood was not just any blood—it was virgin born blood; blood which coursed through the veins of the One who worked miracles; it was innocent blood, righteous blood; blood in which there was no blemish, even sinless blood. This was blood that flowed from a heart that burned with love for each one of us—personally. Jesus is the only person in human history that could meet the qualifications as an unblemished blood sacrifice, and be placed on the altar in our stead,

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

—Isaiah 53:5-6

This is true substitutionary sacrifice, “*He was wounded for our transgressions...*” The full weight of sin against God, and the entire penalty and consequences called for by the broken Law, was laid upon the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross which was fittingly located on a mount called the

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“*place of a skull*” (cf. Matt. 27:33). The cross was the true altar where all with faith in Jesus were redeemed, reconciled, and forgiven of iniquities and transgressions against Almighty God.

There is no power in fig leaves, no power in the works of men’s hands, but there is life giving, soul cleansing power in the precious blood of the Lamb,

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; ¹⁹But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

—1 Peter 1:18-19

This is the aspect of dealing with God, in regard to our sin, that is often overlooked. It is commonly thought that God just sweeps the trash under the rug, that sin is just placed out of mind and out of sight, but nothing could be further from the truth. Sin has to be dealt with straight-up; the consequences have to be satisfied. The Bible says, “*The soul that sinneth it shall die*” (cf. Ez. 18:4). This death sentence holds true today, and God is a just and righteous God who is not a respecter of persons. If God could simply sweep sin under the rug then the cross of Jesus Christ was a big mistake, and a useless, vain exercise.

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God has been moving since the Garden of Eden to bring man back to Himself for a wonderful eternal purpose. In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son to shed His blood and die for the sin of all with faith in Him, subsequently defeating death, hell and the grave in His resurrection. What a great price was paid for the faithful of Christ.

Salvation is a great work, a hard work, a work that even God had to show great strength and power to accomplish. Salvation, through Christ, shows that God is true to His holy character and true to His salvation promises. God has not violated His holiness by saving man from the consequences of the broken Law, and He has not violated His tender, compassionate, loving nature by discarding His wayward creatures. Paul, when writing to the Romans, made this very point as he waxed eloquent on the great salvation truth that God is “just” in the righteous display of mercy, by being the Justifier of all who believe in the work of Jesus,

*To declare, I say, at this time [God's] righteousness:
that [God] might be just, and the justifier of him
which believeth in Jesus.*

—Romans 3:26

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THE INVITATION TO RECEIVE THE COVERING OF CHRIST

The amazing thing about this wonderful work of God is that it is a gift to man, if man will only receive it. We are told that,

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

—*Ephesians 2:8*

Dear reader, if you have not experienced the forgiveness of God, and would stand ashamed before Him on that great day to come, you can receive this gift by faith. Hear and heed the tender call. The scriptural instructions on how to receive this gift, could not be simpler or clearer,

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

—*Romans 10:9-11*

THE HEALING OF THE JUSTIFIED

After we have had our sins **revealed** to us and **dealt** with by the Lord (in His way), **healing** takes place in the

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heart and soul when we are placed “*in Christ.*” This is what the Bible describes as being “*born again,*” “*saved;*” being “*quicken,*” or “*made alive;*” and even “*called into the light.*” Being forgiven of our sin brings a newness, and freshness to life that otherwise had been spoiled:

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.

—2 Corinthians 5:17

The phrases that describe salvation healing are many and include,

- “*new creature*” (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17)
- “*freed from sin*” (cf. Rom. 6:7)
- “*shall not be ashamed*” (cf. Rom. 10:11)
- “*no condemnation*” (cf. Rom. 8:1)
- “*heirs according to the promise*” (cf. Gal. 3:29)
- “*blessed with all spiritual blessings*” (cf. Eph. 1:3)
- “*His workmanship*” (cf. Eph. 2:10)
- “*shall never die*” (cf. John 11:25)

This list, is a mere feeble effort to communicate the wonderful things that Jesus does in the troubled heart of

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man, but really, an infinite supply of all the paper and ink in the world would not be adequate to describe the riches of His grace toward us, as the works that He does in the hearts of men cannot be articulated by words.

How do you describe the work of Christ in making the woeful heart to sing? How can you write about love that passes knowledge? How do you express the blessings that only the great Eternal One can bring to a torn and tossed life? Explain—if you can—how He can set the sinful heart free from the bondage of sin. How do you write all about the One that heals the broken in heart and binds up their wounds? How can we understand enough to tell all of the One who knows the number of the stars, and calls them by name? If one could record these things, the world itself could not contain the books that should be written (cf. John 21:25).

No matter our understanding, He heals those who call on Him to be healed; He saves those who call on Him to be saved. The comfort and mercy of the Lord are for those who fear His holy name.

We are told that in the wonderful City of eternity there will be the tree of life that will yield her fruit every month, and the Holy Spirit made sure that we knew that the

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leaves in this particular tree have a wonderful healing purpose,

In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

—Revelation 22:2

This tree will never be barren, it will always bear fruit, for it thrives in the midst of the Life-Giver and Healer, “By whose stripes [we are] healed” (1 Pet. 2:24b).

The Scriptures only disclose fringes of salvation truth that we have the ability to understand, but what little has been made known to us is truly wonderful. The Father in Heaven has instructed us to step into the Light so our sins can be **revealed** and confessed. In the fullness of time, He brought forth His Son to **deal** with our sins (staying true to His holy character and promises of His word), and He has promised to **heal** from the tragic effects of sin for all of eternity. In this truth is the abundant healing, and comfort of the saints. Amen. ✠

PRACTICING THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

*And [Jesus] spake a parable unto them to this end,
that men ought always to pray, and not to faint...*

—*Luke 18:1*



When we talk about the Christian life, we talk about walking in the Spirit. When we talk about walking in the Spirit, we have to talk about prayer. The energy and soul of the work of the Christian comes out of the prayer closet, and is the key defense against the wiles of the devil. Prayer is the breath that renews a Christian heart; prayer is not only asking for a blessing, it is asking to be a blessing. Prayer converts boring, daily tasks into an act of worship and opens the door to the will of God for our lives. Prayer helps us to keep the end of our life in view, and to number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom. Time spent in prayer is indeed time well spent. To think that we can come “*boldly to the throne of grace*” (cf. Heb. 4:16) is a privilege,

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and it is a privilege that should be practiced continually. It speaks volumes that we have no record of Jesus teaching His disciples on how to prepare a sermon, but we do have a record of Jesus teaching His disciples to pray.

The way Jesus taught us to address God in prayer is (in and of itself) a tender invitation that should encourage even the hardest of hearts to enter into faithful, meaningful, effectual discourse with God:

*After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father
which art in heaven*

—*Matthew 6:9a*

Through this simple statement, Christians are taught that our relationship with God is an intimate family relationship—we are to call Him “Father.” This is a special honor (for believers) made possible by the adoption wrought in Christ, which positions us such that we are “*accepted in the beloved*” (cf. Eph. 1:6). It is intensely comforting that God is not approached in prayer as an avenging Judge, but as a reconciled, loving, caring Father. This teaching gives us a confidence of the commitment of God to each of His children. Often, we are reminded by many a zealous preacher that we should have a commitment to God—and we should—but sometimes

PRACTICING THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

we neglect to remember that God has pledged a vast commitment to His own. We have every reason to confidently go to our “Father” for help in time of need; for guidance when the way grows rough and dark; for forgiveness when we have disobeyed Him; for strength when we are weak; for power to resist the tempter, and for His will to be accomplished. Our Father also understands those times in which we come to Him just simply be quiet and still in His presence, hallowing His holy name. Christ, in this simple reference to God as our “Father,” has encouraged us to practice this great privilege that has been given to us called “prayer.”

Our subject Scripture gives the admonition, “*Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*” If this was the only statement in the Bible, regarding the Christian’s prayer life, it would suffice to drive the truth home that prayer is important. The necessity of the constancy of prayer is recorded in several places in the Bible: 1 Thess. 5:17 tells us to “*pray without ceasing;*” Romans 12:12 says, “*Continuing instant in prayer*”. These verses reveal to us that prayer is an attitude, even a life style that demands fellowship with God and a sober, vigilant, reverent heart. This type of attitude will make common tasks an exploit of devotion to God. Everyday life actually becomes a holy sacrament.

SUMMARIES OF THE NARROW WAY

I often wonder why we have to be encouraged multiple times in Scripture to be faithful in our prayer life. Could it be, prayer is the one thing that is most resisted by the average, everyday Christian? This is not merely due to slothfulness, or disinterest; prayer is resisted mightily by forces other than flesh and blood. Paul warned us, *“For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”* (Ephesians 6:12).

Oh, the times, they seem so rare,
When we bow our knee in prayer.
Our Lord awaits with much care,
For us to bow our knee in humble prayer.

The Devil sets out many snares,
To rob our time of needed prayer.
The burdens are great that we must bear,
We should give them to Jesus, in humble prayer.

The Spirit blows, just like the air,
When we bow our knee in prayer.
He shows us Jesus, that He is fair,
When we bow our knee in humble prayer.

So, come on Christian, do you dare
To bow your knee in prayer?
The whole armor of God you will surely wear,
If you will bow your knee in humble prayer.

PRACTICING THE PRIVILEGE OF PRAYER

Prayer, however, is not just constancy of attitude, it is a definite action. The New Testament records multiple incidents where Jesus set aside time, and found a place to pray,

And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.

—Mark 1:35

If our Lord (in His humanity) needed time with the Father in prayer, how much more do we need that time when we fall on our knees before the living and true God for a “sweet hour of prayer”? Notice, that these verses say that Jesus went to a “solitary place” for prayer; this is our example for the place to practice this wonderful privilege. There is a time for public prayer, there were times when Jesus offered public prayers, but for our regular intimate time with the Lord, we are called to seek that “solitary place,”

[Jesus said] But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

—Matthew 6:6

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Practicing the privilege of prayer does not shape God's will to what we want; prayer will shape our will to God's. This enormous truth is taught when Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane,

*Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me:
nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.*

—*Luke 22:42*

Jesus did indeed drink of that cup, that cup of the cross, but His heart was satisfied in the will of God, and that is a wonderful place to be. We know that it was “*for the joy before Him that he endured the cross.*” Doing God's will brought intense satisfaction and joy to the heart of our Savior. We should take note, that this joy was only satisfied and settled in His troubled heart through prayer.

If you want to know if God is alive today—practice the privilege of prayer. If you want your life to change for the better—practice the privilege of prayer. If you want to extend love to a lost and dark world—practice the privilege of prayer. If you need help staying the course on the narrow way—practice the privilege of prayer. If you want to be like Jesus—practice the privilege of prayer. For “*...men ought always to pray and not to faint.*” ☩

THE OLDEST SIN

*The wicked, through the pride of his countenance,
will not seek after God: God is not in all his
thoughts.*

—*Psalm 10:4*



On April 10, 1912 the White Star Line’s colossal ocean liner named, RMS *Titanic*, set to sea on its maiden voyage enroute to New York City from Southampton, England. After being at sea for four days, she sank to the bottom of the ocean. This heartbreaking disaster logged a death toll of over 1,500 people. Death was no respecter of persons as the victims included third class immigrants to America, along with the rich and famous. *Titanic* required a little over two years to build, but she sank in just a little over two hours.

How could this happen? This ship was dubbed virtually “**unsinkable**,” because it had been designed with the latest “fail-safe” ship building technology of all time. It is documented that even one of the deckhands

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(while attempting to steady a nervous passenger) went so far to say,

“God Himself could not sink this ship.”

The ship’s owners, The White Star Line, had planned to set an Atlantic crossing speed record. The marking feature of this enormous vessel was that of luxury and opulence. Even one of the four smoke stacks (sometimes called funnels) was added to the ship’s design, just to make the appearance more powerful and impressive (it was used for ventilation of the numerous galleys). Such confidence was placed in this gigantic wonder of mans’ invention, that the ship did not carry a sufficient number of life boats to accommodate all the passengers. There seemed to be nary a thought of the possibility of failure.

Of course, we know what sank the *Titanic*—she struck an iceberg in the darkness of the night of April 14th, 1912. The impact ripped out thousands of rivets and buckled the hull, allowing water to flood into several of the watertight compartments that were designed to keep the vessel afloat, in the event of such a fate. Was it just coincidence that this terrible tragedy happened on the famous ship’s maiden voyage? Was it merely the result of Captain Edward J. Smith’s inattention to the dangers of the icy Atlantic? Did mans’ prideful proclamations of the

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Titanic's durability go beyond the toleration of Heaven? We can only sit a century removed from that dreadful night and learn what biblical truth, history, and the illumination of the Holy Spirit teach.

The oldest sin revealed in Scripture is the sin of PRIDE, and there are multiple biblical events where this sin was committed, and subsequently judged by the Lord. Was the *Titanic* disaster a modern event of biblical proportions? The thought is worth considering; especially when we take into account the circumstances and publicity surrounding the calamity. The point, in which we are sure, is the importance that we learn from the *Titanic* tragedy, and that our ears are wide open to the stern warnings from God's Word to beware of the oldest of sins. When this granddaddy of all sin grips the heart, God is absent from our thinking; there is no praying, no faith, and no seeking Him. As our focal verse proclaims, "...*God is not in all his thoughts.*" What a dangerous place to be!

When we consider the oldest sin, we have to go back to its origins and—believe it or not—its origin is not with man. This sin goes back to a creature the Bible refers to in a variety of ways: tempter, accuser, murderer, destroyer, evil one, old serpent, prince of the power of

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the air, the ruler of this world, god of this world, our adversary, dragon, father of lies, Lucifer, the enemy, even the Devil and Satan. When the devil was originally created he wasn't the Devil, he was the "*anointed cherub*" (cf. Ez. 28:14). He is not evil looking and scary, quite the contrary, he is beautiful and wise. Look at the following verses that describe him,

- "*...full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty*" (Ezekiel 28:12b).
- "*...the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. ¹⁴Thou art the anointed cherub the covereth; and I have set thee so; thou wast upon the holy mountain of God...*" (Ezekiel 28:13b-14a).
- "*Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee*" (Ezekiel 28:15).

Notice the last phrase of the last verse, "*...till iniquity was found in thee.*" This "anointed cherub" sinned. The question then arises,

"What was the iniquity that was found in this very beautiful, wise, musical cherub?"

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Ezekiel 28:17a gives us the answer,

*“Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty,
thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy
brightness: I will cast thee to the ground...”*

The biblical record tells us that the sin of **PRIDE** lifted the cherub’s heart up, to such a place, that he took his eyes off God and worshiped himself. His pride was at such an elevated level, he contrived big plans, plans that would usurp God from His throne. In the words of one of my favorite Bible teachers, Dr. J. Vernon McGee,

“The devil did not want to be the Devil, he wanted to be God!”

In the following Scripture, we see that this anointed cherub’s name is Lucifer, and we learn the details of his master plan. Notice the “I wills,”

*How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! ¹³For thou hast said in thine heart, **I will** ascend into heaven, **I will** exalt my throne above the stars of God: **I will** sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: ¹⁴**I will** ascend above the heights of the clouds; **I will** be like the most High. ¹⁵Yet*

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*thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the
pit.*

—*Isaiah 14:12-15*

This is the origin of the oldest sin, and this same sin was ushered into the human race through the serpent's temptation of Eve in the Garden of Eden. We find the biblical account of the fall of man in the third chapter of Genesis, where we see the Devil spreading his false gospel which appeals to the heart of man,

"Ye shall be as gods" (Genesis 3:5b) the devil promised Eve; she yielded.

Alas, just as Satan, man has wanted to be supreme ever since. This subtle promise of the devil is what leads man into looking to himself for his joy and satisfaction—which will never be found. There is not enough money, not enough fleshly pursuits, not enough material works of his own creation that will ever satisfy his heart. Every man has to be taught by the Spirit of God,

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the
kingdom of heaven*

—*Matthew 5:3*

The fall of man turned man's perception of this truth upside down and inside out.

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Even today, Satan continues to deceive as he walks to and fro as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8). The same tactics he used with Eve continue to be effective today. The temptation of pride actually blinds the mind, lest one should believe in the glorious gospel of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4).

This oldest of sins is partnered with a sorry lot. When you do a study of the word “pride” in the Bible, the following words will be found in its company,

Wicked, destruction, abomination, punish, wrath, perish, evil, vanity, shame, contention, foolish, low, contempt, woe, violence, iniquity, abase, hardened, fall, deceived, and condemnation.

The Lord hates a proud look, it is the look of Satan himself (cf. Prov. 6:16-17).

Satan promised Eve satisfaction and power; instead, what the serpent’s subtle promise really brought was judgment—as it always ultimately does. This truth was proved at the tower of Babel, where man said, “*Let us make us a name*” (cf. Gen. 11:4); this moved God’s mighty hand in the scattering and dividing of man. Pharaoh of old let pride get the best of him, when he ignored many wonders from heaven before losing all of his horses, chariots and horseman in the surge of the Red Sea (cf.

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Exod. 14:26-28). Time would fail me to tell of the ancient Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, and how his pride resulted in him living as an animal and eating grass as oxen (cf. Dan. 4:30-33). You can put it down in stone: Pride brings judgment!

Today, even with the benefit of looking back at biblical and modern history, men still continue to shake a fist in God's face. The United States has had laws in place since 1973 protecting a woman's "right" to break the sixth commandment, "*Thou shalt not kill*" (cf. Exod. 20:13). We now have "pride days," marches and celebrations that proudly proclaim that we have "alternative lifestyles" which God calls an "*abomination*" (cf. Lev. 18:22). Our television and movies are saturated with violence, immorality and four letter words. In effect, man continues to say, "**We are unsinkable.**" We, just as the White Star Line, are oblivious to sufficient life boats, and have no consideration of the possibility of eternal dangers lying ahead. God's patience with us has been misinterpreted as slackness, and man has turned His teaching of grace and love into lust and lasciviousness. We are walking by sight and not by faith. Sure, we don't mind publically recognizing God and ask for His blessing by singing *God Bless America*, but we do so on our own terms; there is no mention of turning to Him and obeying

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His Word. The wonderful refuge of the gospel is largely ignored today in public life. Professing ourselves to be wise we have become fools. Our country, as well as each individual, needs to hear and heed God's warnings,

- *“When pride cometh, then cometh shame...” (Proverbs 11:2a).*
- *“Pride goeth before destruction...” (Proverbs 16:18a).*
- *“A man's pride shall bring him low...” (Proverbs 29:23a).*
- *An high look, and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin (Proverbs 21:4).*

Contrasting with pride is humility. This condition of heart brings us out of the thorns and thistles of sin, and leads us into the peace and tranquility with God. We are told that a person must humble himself *“as a little child”* to enter into the kingdom of heaven, for the great truth still rings out,

...God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”

—1 Peter 5:5b

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The Lord Jesus confronted the issue of pride, even with his own disciples, which prompted the great “little child” teaching,

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? ²And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, ³And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. ⁴Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

—Matthew 18:1-4

Our Lord Jesus Christ is always the best example of gospel truth. The apostle Paul wrote to the saints in Philippi about how Jesus humbled Himself in His salvation work for man, he referred to this humbling as “*the mind of Christ,*” and emphasized that this is a characteristic that should be exhibited by God’s children,

*Let this **mind be in you,** which was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: ⁷But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness*

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of men: ⁸And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

—*Philippians 2:5-8*

If the great salvation work, of the very Son of God, was conceived and born out of humility—how much more should this unspeakable gift be accepted with a bowed knee before Him who “*loved [us] and gave Himself for [us]*” (cf. Gal. 2:20)?

Once again, in contrast with the word “pride,” we find the word “humility” partnering itself with pleasant, refreshing words of Scripture,

Wisdom, honor, revive, crown of glory, kingdom of heaven, exalted, grace, riches, life.

It is only the Lord that can, and will, exalt the lowly and grant rewards to the “*poor in spirit,*” demonstrating that His ways are higher than our ways (cf. Isa. 55:9). Once again, read the grace filled, contrasting Scriptural views of pride and humility,

*When pride cometh, then cometh shame: **but with the lowly is wisdom***

—*Proverbs 11:2*

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*A man's pride shall bring him low: **but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit***

—Proverbs 29:23

Humility brings about profound changes in a person's life. In the Old Testament, we see God's wonderful loving-kindness at work in the life of Manasseh, who was one of the most wicked, prideful kings in the history of the nation Israel,

*Wherefore the LORD brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, which took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. ¹²And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and **humbled himself greatly before the God** of his fathers, ¹³And prayed unto him: and he was intreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD he was God.*

—2 Chronicles 33:11-13

We have a Savior whose incarnation was brought to pass by humility; this humility demonstrated God's good will and loving favor to man. By this we know we have an approachable God, who wants the sin question settled

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in our lives, for He lovingly invites us to come to Him for help. Hebrews 4:16 says,

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Have we acknowledged the sin of pride in our life? If so, there is plenty of grace for you and me—just as there was plenty of grace for Manasseh.

In the same manner as Captain Edward J. Smith, of the *Titanic*, sent out a distress signal and deployed the lifeboats, it is time for us to pray and find refuge in Christ. Our Land needs to heed the revival call from God's Word—read from 2 Chronicles 7:14,

*If my people, which are called by my name, shall **humble themselves**, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

Our nation is moving full speed ahead in the darkness of pride and presumption. Unless we adjust the rudder and change our course, we are headed for the icebergs of God's judgment, which are dead ahead. ☞

REMEDY FOR A TROUBLED HEART

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

—John 14:1-3



The disciples had been given news from the Lord Jesus that they did not want to hear. With a troubled spirit, He spoke to them of His betrayal from within their own ranks; He spoke of leaving them for a time; He spoke of denial of His name, and He spoke of the incredible thought of the disciples fleeing from Him and scattering in fear. Such are the accompanying offenses of the cross that Christ was preparing to bear. What these fishers of men thought to be impossible and

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contrary to where they believed following Jesus would lead them, was being foretold by the Lord Himself. Their hearts' desire was to be with Christ and to see Him bring in the Kingdom, but they hadn't considered that their Master and Lord was also the suffering Servant of Jehovah, and had yet to be smitten and put to grief. They had forgotten that He was to be rejected, wounded and bruised; as His very soul would be poured out in death as an offering for sin. The disciples had not grasped the fact that this Servant was to make His grave with the wicked and rich alike, just as the prophets of old had declared (cf. Isa. 53). Indeed, a grave must needs be made, for the iniquities of many must be bore and that same number must be justified. The words of the prophets also told that the Savior-Servant was to be satisfied in a great victory over that same grave, with His days prolonged to see His seed born through His labor; in a word—resurrection. The disciples had not considered that neither a jot, nor a tittle of the law and the prophets would be allowed to fall to the ground in the great redemption plan of the Almighty (cf. Matt. 5:17-18).

The disciples were frightened, confused and unsure of what their future held. These men had left everything—families, vocations and even fortunes. Now, more than any other time, they needed comfort in their uncertainty.

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It was at this time that Jesus tenderly gathers them together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wing.

THE FIRST INGREDIENT – BELIEVE!

The promises Jesus used to administer the comfort needed by His disciples, still soothes many a needy soul today,

*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God,
believe also in me.*

—*John 14:1*

The Prince of Peace will not leave His own comfortless. In this verse, He gives them the base ingredient of the remedy for a troubled heart, which also happens to be the most basic precept in the Bible—faith. Jesus’ tender discourse, in John 14, includes many promises, but promises alone would not steady the heart. Jesus issued a directive that, when put in force, brings the desired outcome,

“... believe ...” (cf. John 14:1b).

Faith in Christ is where comfort for any heart begins. Jesus asked them to believe in Him, just as they believe in the Father. Belief in Jesus as the Christ is not faith in a mere man, but faith that asserts trust in the Father in

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Heaven. The truth that Jesus is in the Father, and the Father is in the Son, is a central theme of Scripture. Jesus had taught, "... *whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me*" (Luke 9:48b). The apostle John recorded an even more daring statement by the Lord Jesus,

Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. ⁴⁵ And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.

—John 12:44-45

Such revelation further develops our understanding of Jesus as the "*light of the world.*" Jesus brings "*light*" to our understanding of God, for He is the express image and glory of the Father (cf. Heb. 1:3). Without Jesus, we would know very little of God's nature and good will toward us:

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.

—2 Corinthians 4:6

It is because of Jesus we can know the Father; they are One in essence. When the disciple Thomas asked Jesus

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the way to the Father, Jesus didn't give him a road map or explain a complex theological system—He simply said,

I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. ⁷If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.

—John 14:6-7

The role of the Son of God not only consisted of the revelation of the Father, but also as that of a mediator. A mediator is one who stands between opposing sides as a conciliator, or a go-between, if you please. Jesus is the only One in human history that was human, yet divine. The virgin born Son of Mary can hold the hand of God the Father in one hand, and hold the hand of man in the other for the purpose of reconciliation. The New Testament is quite clear on the mediation work of Christ,

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ...

—1 Timothy 2:5

Christ is the only Mediator between God and man; let us not think that we can parade into the presence of the Holy Throne without help, without an advocate (cf. 1 John 2:1). Jesus is that help! He is that humble Advocate

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that meets all the qualifications to approach the Almighty on our behalf. He is not only a Mediator, but our great High Priest who has offered the perfect sacrifice without blemish and without spot. He intercedes for us at the very throne of the Father, where His blood has been presented to satisfy the consequences of sin against God—on mans' behalf,

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

—*Hebrews 4:14*

This is the precise reason He came in fashion of a man, to be our go-between and sacrifice. Jesus is indeed a man—thus called the Son of Man; but He is also indeed God—thus called the Son of God. Jesus has opened the way to God so that we can come boldly to the throne of grace (cf. Heb. 4:16a). For this reason, He could say, “*Believe in God, believe also in me.*” Oh yes, this way is narrow, but be sure that no person can approach the Father in heaven except through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Many accused Him of blasphemy because of this teaching—this is how Jesus answered those accusations,

Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I

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said, I am the Son of God? ³⁷If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. ³⁸But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.

—John 10:36-38

The truth of Jesus and His person is the foundation on which our comfort and salvation rests. The rest and comfort of the heart is only secured in a right relationship with God, and that is only found through forgiveness of sins and hope for the future. If Jesus is not who the Bible declares Him to be, then there is no mediator, no advocate, no hope, no comfort, no rest—we are of all men most miserable (cf. 1 Cor. 15:19). It is not in the power of sinful man to grant the comfort that comes from the forgiveness of sins committed against God—that is solely in the hands of Him who loves with an everlasting love. The works and miracles of Christ, recorded in the New Testament, were intended to be an undeniable testimony that Jesus has the power to forgive sins. The following situation upholds this very truth,

And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. ³And, behold, certain of the

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scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. ⁴And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? ⁵For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? ⁶But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. ⁷And he arose, and departed to his house. ⁸But when the multitudes saw it, they marvelled, and glorified God, which had given such power unto men.

—Matthew 9:2-8

Jesus healed the man, not only out of love and compassion, but as a testimony to the truth that He was God in flesh, one with the Father, and had the power from Heaven to forgive sins. Anyone can say, “*Thy sins be forgiven,*” but not just anyone can say to a lame man, “*Arise and walk,*” and have the sick man obey the command. The entire crowd could only “marvel” and glorify God. Hence, Jesus could tell the sick man with complete authority and power,

Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee.

—Matthew 9:2b

REMEDY FOR A TROUBLED HEART

The good cheer, comfort and rest that results from sins forgiven is received through faith in Christ, and confirmed through Him as the Mediator of the New Covenant. Allow the words of Christ to sink deep into our hearts, *“Ye believe in God, believe also in me.”*

All things are possible for those who believe. On another occasion, recorded in the Gospel of Mark, a child of one of the rulers of the synagogue had been gravely ill. While the ruler desperately sought the aid of Christ, the child died. Seemingly, all hope was lost. However, Jesus heard the ill report of the child, and said these most gracious and comforting words to her father,

“Be not afraid, only believe” (Mark 5:36).

Is not this the same tenor of speech Jesus used with His disciples? Once again, Jesus directs the disturbed heart to faith, and then proceeded to the house of the ruler of the synagogue. Once there, He found many weeping and wailing over the child, Jesus tries to comfort them by saying, *“The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth.”* The crowd, in their unbelief, responded by laughing him to scorn, rejecting the mighty comforting power of the word of Christ. Jesus then put the scorners out, and brought the child’s parents into where the child was, and said, *“Damsel, I say unto thee arise.”* The child immediately *“arose*

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and walked,” leaving all those around “*astonished.*” I am sure the child’s parents were more than a little comforted.

Faith in Christ releases His power to reward all those who diligently seek Him (cf. Heb. 11:6). It is true that not all prayers and requests of the faithful are answered in the same way, but you can be assured that in whatever way the Lord chooses to move, He will satisfy your heart and provide the comfort needed in any situation.

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me ...” (Psalm 138:7a)

Events chronicled in the New Testament which hindered the work of Christ always involved “unbelief.” The Bible teaches that Jesus could not do many mighty works, in His hometown of Nazareth, “*Because of their unbelief*” (cf. Matt. 13:58). The people of Nazareth only saw Jesus as “*the carpenter’s son,*” they knew that His mother was named Mary, and that He had other brothers and sisters—just like any other average family in Nazareth. They may have been astonished at His wisdom and mighty works which were done amongst them, but instead of receiving Him for who He was, they were offended (cf. Matt. 13:54-58). Isn’t it ironic to think that those who knew Jesus best (in His earthly life), missed out on the many blessings and comforts of the Savior

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through unbelief? Not only do we miss out on comfort and blessings, we are told that, “...*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Heb. 11:6a). Let it not be said of our lives that Christ could do no mighty work in our heart because of our own unbelief.

Clearly, the comfort that comes from Heaven is one of the direst needs of the human heart. It is a mighty work of the Savior to still the waves during the storms of life. Dear friend, do you have a troubled heart? “*Be not afraid, only believe.*”

THE SECOND INGREDIENT – THE PREPARED PLACE

The second ingredient, that comprises the remedy of the troubled heart, was Christ’s assurance of where He was going and what He was going to do,

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

—John 14:2-3

The cost of discipleship was high. When Jesus walked the earth (in His showing to the world) even He lacked the very basic necessity of a place to call home,

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*And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes,
and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of
man hath not where to lay his head.*

—*Matthew 8:20*

The disciples would suffer this same worldly fate, as they would have “*no certain dwelling-place*” (cf. 1 Cor. 4:11b) while laboring to get the gospel to the world. Jesus, very clearly, reassures His disciples that they had a home that was in the Father’s house. Yes, they would suffer the rejection of the world and be considered foolish spectacles by many, but Jesus gives them a guarantee that would help their hearts endure. It is a comfort to all of God’s children to consider the transitory nature of this life, as compared with the eternal reward of the Father’s house. This present world and its lusts are “*passing away*” (cf. 1 John. 2:17), but the Father’s house has eternal abiding places steadied with a sure foundation prepared for the entire household of faith; Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone.

The Father’s house is another term that the Bible uses to refer to what is commonly known as “Heaven.” The Father’s house is an amiable dwelling that is desired and longed for by all of the faithful. It is a place where the sweet will of God is in full force, as His Word is “*settled forever*” in this place (cf. Psa. 119:89). Jesus is there now

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preparing those eternal places. Exactly what Jesus is doing to prepare those places is not totally revealed, but we do know these places will not be prepared with hands (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1). The sacrificial work of Christ on the cross and His current resurrection work at the right hand of the Father as our Intercessor, are certainly part of this preparation (cf. Heb. 7:25). So, the one thing we can say (for sure) is that this heavenly labor is one that is worked with love, mercy and forgiveness of a multitude of sins. How comforting it is to know that our earthly dwelling (ever how humble or affluent) is not all there is; something superior awaits the believing heart which has been in the making before the foundation of the world, with the materials and workmanship guaranteed for all eternity (cf. Mat. 25:34).

THE THIRD INGREDIENT – CERTAINTY

Jesus adds still another ingredient to His remedy for the troubled heart. This ingredient emphasizes the certainty of the precious truths of His person and the Father's house, when He added the statement,

“... if it were not so, I would have told you ...”

—John 14:2b

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This reassurance takes me back to the record of creation in the book of Genesis, which tells us that when God spoke His desire immediately that desire was fulfilled. God said, *“Let there be light: and there was light”* (Gen.1:3b); when God spoke His desire for the sun and moon to be created, we find that *“...it was so”* (cf. Gen. 1:15). If ever there was a sure place to lay a foundation, it is on the Rock of God’s Word. Over and over in the creation account we see that when God spoke His desire, the Bible simply states, *“...and it was so.”* When we look into the sky and see the sun, moon and stars, it should bring great assurance to our hearts that He put those things in place by His powerful Word. Such things, in the physical realm, lend credibility that His future promises will come to pass in like manner. Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but His words shall not pass away (cf. Mark 13:31). When Jesus says, *“If it were not so, I would have told you,”* we can rest with everlasting comfort and confidence and say in praise, “Thank you Lord, it is so!”

THE FOURTH INGREDIENT – THE PROMISE OF HIS PRESENCE

The final ingredient, of this soothing balm for the heart, is the promise of His return and presence,

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I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

—*John 14:3b*

We know the disciples did not want Christ to leave them; they were troubled at the thought. They had experienced His presence as a special place of overwhelming comfort, love, joy and peace. The promise of being re-united with Him is an encouragement that the best is yet-to-come. Paul the Apostle makes a conclusive statement in his letter, to the church at Philippi, regarding his desire to be in the presence of Christ,

... having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better.

—*Philippians 1:23*

Being with Christ is far better than the best this world has to offer. The cold rejection that the Christian receives from the world is in stark contrast to the warm, loving, accepting, receiving presence of Christ. This worldly rejection doesn't just come from strangers, or those in which we have no attachment; this rejection can occur even in ones' own household (cf. Matt. 10:35-36). This hurtful rejection will never be found in the presence of Christ. All of God's children look for this blessed acceptance—never again to feel the sharp, cold pains of

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rejection. We will never find mercy as great as is found in the hands of the Lord, for all who are Christ's will be nourished as a cherished bride. I have come to the conclusion that one of the most beautiful, comforting, and loving phrases in the Bible comes from Ephesians 1:6b,

"... [Jesus] hath made us accepted in the beloved."

—Ephesians 1:6b

Being in the presence of Christ brings acceptance that many never experience in the present life. Being "*accepted in the beloved*" is the much needed antidote for a heart that has been broken by rejection. He will "*receive*" us, and will never cast out any that come to Him (cf. John. 6:37). That is His promise!

Being accepted as God's child will also bring the reward of the crown of righteousness, as the apostle Paul writes,

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

—2 Timothy 4:8

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This “*crown*” is given based on the work of Christ and His righteousness; it is a reward, not for the Apostle only, but for all who love His appearing. This “*crown*” is the portion given to God’s children that consists of everything true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praise worthy (cf. Php. 4:8). Our natural bodies—though presently dishonored, corrupt and weak—will be raised in glory, incorruption and power as a spiritual body in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:42-44). No good thing will be withheld from all who dwell in the many abiding places of the Father’s house. No longer will the heart yearn for the things of God as a child looking through a “dark glass” (cf. 1 Cor. 13:12), but will, as a full grown son inherit the wonderful, satisfying qualities of the likeness of Christ, and will be in full possession of them!

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.
—*Psalm 17:15*

In the presence of Christ, all will drink His pleasures from the river of the water of life, and behold the beauty of the light of His marvelous countenance as the sun shining in his strength. Absent from this place will be death, tears, sorrow, crying and pain—these are former

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things which will be passed away and remembered no more, as are all things that offend (cf. Rev. 21:4).

This land of the living is a place of loving security. The inhabitants walk in the perfect, unhindered love of the Almighty, who is an everlasting refuge and fortress,

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear ...” (1 John 4:18a).

No fear of darkness need ever come to mind as their will be no night there. Their will be joyful sounds in the Father’s house of never ending praise from the hearts of the redeemed. The presence of God and the Lamb bring love, life and light in a way that man has not experienced since the Garden of Eden, “... *and so shall we ever be with the Lord*” (1 Thess. 4:17b).

Indeed, the rest and quietness of our hearts can be found only in the impenetrable confines of the Father’s house, in the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ has proven (in His resurrection power) that there are no foes who can supremely reign, no enemy He cannot vanquish, and no sinner He cannot save.

Even during the present age, Jesus has promised His presence through the person of the Holy Spirit, who is even referred to by our Lord as a “Comforter,”

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And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; ¹⁷Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.

—John 14:16-17

Dear reader, the comfort of the presence of Christ is not just “pie in the sky” theology. The Comforter is with us today comforting, helping, encouraging, equipping, satisfying, restoring, strengthening, leading, assuring, convicting and correcting. There is no question that when the time comes for Christ to receive us into the Father’s house, the benefits of His presence will be enjoyed unhindered by sin and the flesh. As for today, He has given us the resources necessary to perform His work with power and comfort, along with the ability to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world. Even in our most desperate times we will be able to say with the psalmist,

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: **for thou art with me ...***

—Psalm 23:4a

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The heart in which Christ lives is the rightful possessor of comfort, but how should a believer pray for the world? The prayer of the believer should not be for the comfort of the world, but that unbelieving hearts may be troubled and heavy to the point that relief is sought from on High. A man cannot be saved unless he sees a need to be saved. The message of the Bible is intensely troubling to the Christ-less, worldly heart—and for good reason. Sin has brought a judicial sentence of the “*great day of His wrath*” upon the old creation, which will have the unsaved man crying for the mountains and rocks to hide them from the “*wrath of the Lamb.*” (cf. Rev. 6:16). Those same mountains will be moved and carried to the midst of the sea, as the Earth itself melts, when God merely utters His voice (cf. Psalm 46:1-6).

The unsaved condition is one that needs attention—just like a sick person needs the help of a physician, the sin-sick heart is in need of a Savior. Jesus’ disciples were asked, “How is it that He eats and drinks with publicans and sinners.” Jesus, overhearing the question replied,

*They that are whole have no need of the physician,
but they that are sick: I came not to call the
righteous, but sinners to repentance.*

—Mark 2:17b

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Repeatedly, Jesus stated that He came for those in need. He came for those hungry and thirsty for righteousness. He came to seek and to save that which was lost. He came for those who mourn that they may have comfort. He came for the poor in spirit. He came for those who are last, that they may be first. Jesus came to “*call sinners to repentance.*” Yes, there will be wrath upon all things that have wrecked and ruined God’s creation; but first—there is great mercy promised when we turn to Christ, and turn away from sin.

The great quote from St. Augustine’s prayer could not be more appropriate for a nervous age, which increasingly finds its comfort in “things” and the wisdom of the world,

“Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.”

Jesus has sent out the call of rest and comfort to all who feel the pain of unrelenting burdens and labor,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

—Matthew 11:28-29

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The riveting truth that comes from the tender passages found in John 14, points us to faith in the Son of God who has earned the right to be trusted. The word, “*believe*,” is the directive substance that Christ uses as the catalyst for the comfort of Heaven to operate in the human heart. Do not miss the fundamental truth which teaches that our comfort and rest depends solely upon Jesus—who He is, and what He has done—not upon us. Remember, Jesus gave this comforting discourse to a group of men that were about to forsake Him! Neither was there anything in them, nor is there anything in us that could have attracted His favor to us. Yet, He has freely declared His unchanging, holy, comforting love upon this troubled world. The love of Christ is perfect, and when it is freely received as it was freely given it will always “*cast out fear*” (cf. 1 John 4:18a), and fill the heart with His comforting presence through His Spirit.

Without a doubt, this remedy is a “home” remedy, but it is a remedy that will satisfy the heart until the longing soul reaches the Father’s house, which is, indeed, “Home.”⁸

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And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. ¹¹And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim: ¹²And they forsook the LORD God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the LORD to anger.

—Judges 2:10-12



Generations are shaped by different experiences and perspectives at the time of their influential years. The cultural climate, political leadership and philosophies, events causing hardship, economic conditions, even geography and technology have an effect on the identity of a generation. Ever how much these and other factors influence a generation, there is not a more powerful, defining force than the spiritual

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atmosphere in the nation. In most cases, there is little individual families can do to affect many of the elements that define a generation as a whole, but the family is the God-given place where a spiritual atmosphere exerts the most influence. It is the sum of godly families that make godly nations.

Someone has observantly said,

“The only thing that we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history.”

Generations seem to be in an endless, repeating cycle that includes periods of spiritual awakenings, indifference, crises, deliverance, and then back to revival. If you read and study the book of Judges, you cannot miss the cycle of history Israel exhibits during this time. Using Israel as a case study can help us gain a perspective on our spiritual responsibility to the next generation.

Have you actually sat down and thought about the generation that is rising? I am sure you have, especially in areas of your estate and your children's inheritance. Have you considered the next generation in the Lord? Have you considered their spiritual inheritance? Are you making necessary preparations for the next generation to carry the gospel and the faith of Jesus? Does your current lifestyle and faith give the next generation a

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foundation for which they will be encouraged in serving the Lord, and passing on the gospel to their children? Apparently, Israel had lapses in this area and it cost them. Israel, like all peoples, have a history of “unbelief.” The LORD said (many times) that He knew they were a “stiff-necked” people. If you remember, it was “unbelief” that kept the generation that came out of Egypt from entering into the Promised Land (with the exception of Caleb and Joshua); it was the generation of their children that actually entered the Land. Thus, Scripture seems to imply that the grandchildren’s generation of those who came out of Egypt is in question in our focal Scripture. In any case, this generation that arose (after the death of Joshua) failed in their faith and, consequently, served other gods. God did not ignore this failure, as it provoked Him to anger. Let’s look at some principals found in God’s Word that might help us avoid this very crucial mistake.

THE ERROR

The first thing we must recognize is the root error which caused this generation gap. First of all, Judges 2:10-12 is part of the record of Israel taking possession of the Promised Land—as directed by the LORD. Israel was instructed to rid the land of the existing inhabitants, which also served as a judgment upon those people for the sins in which they delighted. In fact, the Bible

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declares that the Land “*vomited*” them out because of their sin (cf. Leviticus 18:25). The only forceful method for Israel to succeed in taking the Land was for God to drive the nations out for them, but God made it clear that His mighty hand would be stayed if Israel chose to “*cleave*” to the people of the Land (cf. Josh. 23:12-13). Unfortunately, that is exactly what Israel did; as a result, they were greatly influenced by these people, their ways, and their gods.

The many incomplete victories of Israel, chronicled in Judges 1, led to them dwelling amongst the existing inhabitants of the Land (they were not completely driven out as God had instructed). These pagan people would be as “*thorns*” in their sides, and their gods would be a “*snare*” unto them (cf. Jdg. 2:3); accordingly, a generation grew up in the Land amongst rampant idolatry and sin. This generation knew more about the false gods of the Land, than they did of the living and true God which performed mighty wonders in their exodus from Egypt. What a tragedy!

How quick and easy it was for them to forget about the past victories the LORD had performed in the lives of previous generations. How could they have forgotten so quickly about the plagues upon Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the events at Mt. Sinai, water from the rock and

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even the manna from heaven? It seems that great spiritual victories are either soon forgotten, or explained away as time moves on. Today, we live in a generation that possesses more four year college graduates than at any other time in the history of our country. Corresponding to this fact, we often find the faith of previous generations becoming more and more maligned by the “educated” as the generations roll-by. The faith of grandma and grandpa is often credited to superstition and ignorance, rather than the substance of hope, and evidence of the invisible Hand of Providence moving in their lives. When this attitude prevails, we are in the dangerous position of repeating what happened to Israel in the early chapters of Judges.

Today, apart from the influences of the family environment, generations are mightily influenced by what they are taught in school, music and entertainment, and the ever present thorn of the electronic media. We live in a day of technology where every wind of doctrine is available at just the press of a button. The public school system is more brazen and bold than ever to embrace the kind of morality that would be applauded by Sodom and Gomorrah. Ungodly influences abound all around us, and they can very easily lead to indifference toward the things of God and the truth that His Word proclaims of

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sin, salvation and eternity. Take Israel, for example, who had the Law delivered to them in miraculous fashion—you would think those closest to direct revelation would find it hard to be influenced by people who worshipped dumb idols. What nation in ancient history had God so near them? Israel, as God’s chosen treasure, was suppose to be a testimony to the world of the blessedness of knowing and serving the living and true God, but the opposite happened as the pagan gods influenced them. We should take note!

Recognition of our own nature is central to identifying tendencies that would endanger the next generation. We need to understand our own weaknesses and vulnerabilities in order to stay the course. A good bit of the New Testament is committed to exhorting us to be sober, and vigilant in our daily goings. Furthermore, we are taught to understand that when Christ enters our heart by faith, the Spirit of God takes up residence in our hearts, but there still remains with us the old nature that has potential to sin. The Scripture calls this nature, the “*old man*” (cf. Col. 3:9). This “*old man*” must be subdued, it must be mortified and we must not cleave to our old sins,

“...let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us...” (Hebrews 12:1b)

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It is easy to be satisfied with our salvation and not bother with pressing forward in order to gain spiritual ground, but this attitude can be disastrous for the next generation. Ground must be gained in our hearts, spiritual victories must be won, and squatter's rights must not be given to those besetting sins that hinder our maturity in Christ. The warfare that existed in Israel's day serves as an illustration of the struggles in the heart of the believer today. If we allow sin to coexist in our hearts, it will be a "thorn" and "snare" to us, hindering our own maturity in Christ, as well as the progress toward providing the next generation with the Christian influence needed in this dark day.

This leads us to our first biblical principal for protecting the next generation:

ABIDE IN THE WORD OF CHRIST

The following two verses give us a blueprint for helping the next generation. Take note of the prominence that the "Word of Christ" should have in the life of a Christian,

[Jesus said] Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself,

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except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

—*John 15:3-4*

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.

—*Colossians 3:16*

These two verses, although in different books of the New Testament, emphasize the importance of the “*word of Christ*” dwelling in our hearts. I believe this to be the most essential and central part of what molds and energizes the Christian life. These verses explain just what the “*word of Christ*” will do for a person:

- Provides the assurance of Christ dwelling in the heart by the Holy Spirit.
- Cleanses us from sin and keeps us pure in our daily life.
- Works in our heart the spiritual nutrition to produce the fruit of the Spirit in our life—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (cf. Gal. 5:22-23).
- Gives wisdom for daily living.

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- Prepares us to teach the Word and pass it along to others.
- Works a joy into the heart that makes us want to sing those wonderful hymns of the faith.
- Makes the heart graceful and thankful.

The current generation must “*abide*” in Christ, and allow His word to dwell richly in our hearts in order to prevent apostasy in the next. Our relationship with Christ must be REALITY; we must not treat the great truths of Jesus Christ like stories from *Grimm’s Fairy Tales*. The Word of Christ is to be received with meekness, knowing that it is able to save our souls, and this reception includes being doers of the Word and not hearers only (cf. James. 1:21-22). Nothing teaches children and young adults more than when they see the light of the Word of Christ burning brightly in the lives of their elders.

Simon Peter was gravely serious when he responded to a question from the Lord Jesus about whether he, and the other disciples, would follow the crowd and forsake Jesus and His Word. Here is Peter’s response,

Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.

—*John 6:68*

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Peter knew he could never leave the Savior because nothing else would satisfy; nothing else would be worth living for; nothing else would be an eternal possession and nothing motivated and burned in his heart like the Word of Christ. The flame of God's Word was life to Peter—anything else meant death—for to forsake Christ would be to forsake mercy and salvation. It is those Words of eternal life that must be internalized and allowed to live, to dwell, even abide in our very soul. The Word of Christ energizes the Christian to obey the truth, to be sanctified, and to love the brethren with a genuine love. This is the drive that should be behind a godly generation seeking to lead their young in the truth, and ward off those ungodly influences that are out of our control.

The Lord Jesus taught a parable known as, “The Parable of the Sower.” In this parable, Christ lists some of the influences that would “choke” the Word and make us unfruitful,

*But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; ²¹Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when **tribulation or persecution** ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.*

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*²²He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the **care of this world**, and the **deceitfulness of riches**, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.*

—Matthew 13:20-22

These Words were not given to us without purpose—they are right up-to-date and applicable in the present hour. The troubles encountered in life: persecution, peer pressure (wanting to be “part of the crowd”), the cares of the world, and worldly riches are a wonderful synopsis of the “*snare*” and “*thorn*” that we all live amongst and are a powerful influence on each of us. Be it known that if these influences take hold in our life it will “*choke the word*,” with the result being an unfruitful life.

The desire for riches is a massive snare on the human family, but when we abide in the Word, and the Word dwells in us, we know the true definition of being rich toward God. Success in life for the Christian is defined vastly different than that of the world. We can be absolutely destitute in the world’s goods, and yet possess all things that matter for eternity. The grasping generation, that craves and bows down to material wealth is a foolish, short-sighted generation that doesn’t

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understand the truth spoken by the Lord Jesus Christ, when He said,

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

—*Mark 8:36*

Our next principle is very closely linked with the first,

BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be **filled** with the Spirit.*

—*Ephesians 5:18*

The question of being filled with the Holy Spirit is one that is often misunderstood. We are taught, and understand the wonderful truth of when we receive Christ in our heart by faith, we receive the Holy Spirit—this is the new birth spoken of in John, chapter 3. However, being re-born does not necessarily mean that you will be constantly **filled** with the Spirit until the day of your physical death. Indeed, if Christ dwells in your heart by faith, the Holy Spirit is your seal as a “saved” individual (cf. Eph. 1:13-14), which is the earnest of your inheritance, and you are placed in the Body of Christ as a full grown son. However, the state of the individual life,

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in regard to obedience to Christ, will determine if we are “filled” with the Spirit.

In short, every believer **possesses** the Holy Spirit, but not every believer is always **filled** with the Spirit.

GRIEVING AND QUENCHING THE SPIRIT

As a Christian, it is possible to “*grieve*” the Holy Spirit, and it is quite possible to “*quench*” the Holy Spirit.

And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

—*Ephesians 4:30*

To grieve the Spirit is to allow the deeds of the “*old man*” to live on in our daily life (e.g. bitterness, wrath, clamor, anger, evil speaking, etc.). The believer’s unholy personal conduct and thoughts can grieve, or make sorrowful, the Spirit of God such that fellowship with Christ is hindered. We cannot expect to be on good terms with our Lord when we are cherishing those sins that put Him to grief. The grieving of the Spirit gives the impression of hypocrisy to the next generation.

Quench not the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19)

To “quench” the Spirit is to ignore the leading of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit seeks to energize us and lead us in

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our earthly service for the Lord, but when He is resisted we are in danger of backsliding. The backslidden state is just where Israel found themselves in the early chapters of the book of Judges. The quenched Spirit hinders the growth and progress of the next generation.

Though the Christian possesses the Holy Spirit, we are not filled with the Spirit if He is grieved, or quenched in our lives. It is crucial for the next generation that we be *“filled with the Spirit.”*

Our final principle results, primarily, from the work of the Word and the Holy Spirit in our heart and soul:

TEACH THE WORD OF CHRIST

This principle runs through the entire Scripture; it was given to Israel before they entered the Promised Land, but the principle rings true to New Testament Christians,

*And ye shall **teach them your children,**
speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house,
and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest
down, and when thou risest up.*

—Deuteronomy 11:19

Teaching our young the Word of God is critical for the gospel to penetrate the next generation. It goes without saying, that each generation has a responsibility of their

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own to love God and follow Him, but that road is encouraged by a Godly generation who demonstrates the love of Christ through deed and **word**. The New Testament actually refers to the teaching of faith and good doctrine as “nourishing” (cf 1 Tim 4:6). Just as a child requires physical nourishment, they will require spiritual nourishment,

...bring them up [children] in the nurture and admonition of the Lord

—Ephesians 6:4

Teaching the Word of God reaches into young hearts with a power where nothing else can,

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

It has been said,

“The Bible is not a book man could write if he would, or would write if he could.”

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The Bible did not come to the world by the will of men, but “*holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy [Spirit]* (2 Peter 1:21b).” The Bible tells us, God spoke to the prophets of old at different times and in different ways in the world’s history. Men penned the words through their own personality, but it was God’s Word that they wrote. The Word can do a work in the hearts of the next generation that we cannot comprehend; it just has to be ministered faithfully. The Word will work into the heart rejoicing, adoration and praise to God. The Word will produce a joy that is unspeakable, and the heart will overflow with love and care for others. That wonderful Word will produce strength in time of trouble, and it will provide cleansing of sin that we might not live a double minded life. The Word will provide the whole armor needed to stand up against the temptations of the devil. The Word will work in us a desire to be a witness and a light to others, so that we will be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15). This marvelous Word is a working Word, there is no other miracle formula around like it.

A fine example of a person taught the Word of God, from a young age, comes from the pen of the apostle Paul. He wrote to a young preacher named Timothy, whom he sought to encourage and instruct in regard to

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the ministry. We find that this fellow, Timothy, had been taught and trained from a child to know the Scriptures,

And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

—2 Timothy 3:15

Earlier on, in that same epistle, Paul gives credit to Timothy's mother and grandmother for being a wonderful, faithful example to him (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy had benefited from years of nourishment from the Words of faith, and sound teaching of the ways of the Lord. Timothy is a great example that daily exposing our little ones to the Word of God is an important matter in which to attend. Not to mention, the great Bible stories are much more entertaining than what is offered on TV! Prayerful and carefully planned biblical instruction, backed up by a life filled with the wisdom and Spirit of Christ, will be a powerful testimony to encourage the next generation.

By no means should we stop learning as an adult, Paul continued to admonish Timothy to study God's Word—Why?—so he could teach others:

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Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

—2 Timothy 2:15

And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

—2 Timothy 2:2

The Word of Christ can neither dwell in us, nor can we teach the Word unless we know the Word. Bible reading and study are important activities for Christian growth, if we are to hold the course and guard our hearts from the delights of the world. Alas, we are very slow to learn and very quick to forget many of the most basic truths of Scripture. This is where the local church is so important for the rising generation. Each one of us needs to be regularly found in the place where the truths of Christ are faithfully expounded, to the end we find ourselves spiritually encouraged, and even rebuked when necessary. The great doctrines that run throughout the Scripture should be received regularly, and brought back to our remembrance. Other church activities, such as: fellowship, singing and praising the name of Christ, and corporate prayer time go a long way in providing the necessary spiritual vitamins for a healthy Christian life.

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These things help the heart and mind to be in synch on the great basic truths of life itself. When the heart rejoices in the great truths that are received in the intellect, it produces a confidence manifested in a holy life that will be seen by others, including the children of the next generation.

Earlier in this message we asked the question,

“How could have Israel forgotten so quickly about the plagues upon Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the events at Mt. Sinai, water from the rock and even the manna from heaven?”

Perhaps a failure in this area of teaching the Word to their children is to blame. In fact, as we read in Deuteronomy, they were warned that this memory lapse could occur if the things of God were not taught to their young,

*Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, **lest thou forget** the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons...*

—Deuteronomy 4:9

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Is our unwillingness to let go of the things of the world hurting the next generation? I think we all can say that we have ground to gain. Now is the time to correct the error. Now is the time to show the next generation the Lord is the most important thing in our lives. Now is the time to encourage them to trust the Lord for themselves, and let Him do a work in their own heart. Now is the time to “*keep our soul diligently,*” and prepare and equip the next generation. ☞

BACKSLIDING

For Israel slideth back as a backsliding heifer...

—Hosea 4:16a



Hosea was an Old Testament prophet with an up-to-date message. He was commissioned from on High to confront Israel with an indictment of all kinds of sin, revealing to the people where they stood in God's sight—in other words—he was God's mouthpiece. Hosea was a true Prophet, and true prophets did not pull any punches, scratch itching ears, or soften the message in order to escape criticism. The prophet's work was one of heartbreak and sacrifice, a work that was oftentimes misunderstood by many of their hearers, a work that may even cost them their lives.

The objective of delivering such a candid and rough message was in hopes that soften hearts would prevail over hardened hearts, resulting in people turning from their wicked ways and back to the LORD. That is always the goal of the prophet—restoration through repentance. Hosea's showing to Israel not only included fiery

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speeches and eloquent words spoken as he was “*moved by the Holy Ghost,*” but he was a man whose life events were an allegory of the message he was to give; his personal life mirrored the national state. Many contemporary preachers tell stories to illustrate a biblical truth, but Hosea’s very life was his illustration.

At the very beginning of his prophecy, God called Hosea to marry a woman who was a harlot, her name was Gomer. When they had children, their given names were chosen to reflect the spiritual condition of Israel. His wife then left him and went back into harlotry and—to top it off—she was sold into slavery. God then commanded Hosea to go and buy Gomer back out of slavery, and bring her back into his home. Hosea obeyed.

Hosea was a man who knew the hurts of a broken home, he knew how it felt for someone to betray his love and he knew how it felt to be the victim of unfaithfulness. This made him a most qualified man to speak to Israel during this time in the nation’s history. Hosea could go before the nation with a broken heart, and cheeks wet with tears, to communicate a message that Israel had been unfaithful to God and committed adultery with the nations that surrounded them. Gomer had broken her covenant with Hosea, and Israel had broken their covenant with God. He could cry out with the hurt that

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not only he was experiencing in his own life, but also with the hurt that God was experiencing. Then, just as now, God uses hearts tenderized by life's sorrows, disappointments and tragedy to reach out and touch His creatures with eternal truth. It is this kind of heart that can communicate a harsh message, in the manner in which God dictates, in order to provide opportunity to draw wandering souls back to His mercy and forgiveness.

Israel had backslidden and worshipped the work of men's hands—idols. This word “*backslide*” not only speaks to the fact that Israel had gone back to the ways of the world, but they also refused to move forward in the leading of the LORD. Just like a “*backsliding heifer*.” Backsliding, in the scriptural sense, is not being ignorant of the Word of God, it is having come unto knowledge of the Word of God and refusal to heed it; in a word—**rebellion**.

The New Testament illustration of backsliding will offend our aesthetic sense, but such an illustration is quite fitting for such a sin. Read 2 Peter 2:22,

But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.

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Many times in Scripture, God speaks of His relationship with Israel as a marriage relationship; often, He refers to Himself as Israel's Husband. In speaking of the age in which we live now, the Scriptures depict the Church (all who are "in Christ") as a Bride, and Christ as the Bridegroom; thus, the word "adultery" fits very well when attempting to understand the act of backsliding. Backsliding is nothing short of spiritual adultery, which is unfaithfulness to God. The reason unfaithfulness in a marriage relationship is so destructive is because it is a sin against love; a sin against promises made; and the out-and-out thievery of life's greatest, most satisfying joys. Be sure, there can be no greater sin than to sin against the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sermons on backsliding, and unfaithfulness to God, seem to be few and far between today. When I was a child, I remember the word "backsliding" being used very often from the pulpit, but it is not heard much today. More than any other time (during the short time of my pilgrimage) this word needs to make a comeback in our pulpits; danger lurks for the church member flirting with sin and rebellion. A common statement that I hear today from the rank and file church-goer is,

"I want to hear things that will make me feel good about myself when I attend a church service."

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This attitude has shaped the words that flow from our pulpits on Sunday. The ministry today has to guard against the Calling from Heaven being turned into a “profession” driven by pop-culture. Due to rising salaries and plush benefits, the main stream preacher is obliged to keep his congregation “satisfied.” Actually, the goal of attending a church service—and the mission of the preacher—should be to get our eyes off of ourselves and put them on Christ. When we come away from a church service, we should feel good about what Christ has done for us, not bask in our own works! Learning of the seriousness of our sin, and the need of the conquering power of the love of Christ in our life will draw us back to His merciful side for refuge, and there is no better place to be. Alas, all too often, we leave the doors of the church unmoved, unstirred and with hardened hearts—which will lead to further backsliding and inattention to God’s Holy Word. Preaching akin to the prophets of old would be hard medicine for our generation, but it is sorely needed.

When the Lord Jesus addressed the multitudes concerning this matter of turning back, He always spoke with power and authority. Jesus likened the act of backsliding to putting our hands to the plow in order to break up ground for sowing, only to turn back again:

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And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

—*Luke 9:62*

What farmer regrets breaking up his fallow ground? In order to get something out of his fields, it has to be plowed. If there is to be reaping at harvest time, there cannot be any turning back at seed time.

The Old Testament account of the stunning incident when Lot's wife became a pillar of salt (cf. Gen. 19:26), provided the backdrop for this very solemn three word warning of the Lord Jesus,

Remember Lot's wife.

—*Luke 17:32*

Lot's wife looked back. This event teaches that we should, at all costs, refrain from turning back to a judged way of life that is doomed to destruction. The pleasures of sin found in Sodom should remain in Sodom; we must move forward, not backward. Temptations to return to the old way of life begin when we look back; we must flee from the old ways of life and persevere in the new life in Christ. We must forsake Egypt to inherit the Promised Land. The apostle Paul summed up the correct attitude

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of a new creature in Christ when he said, “...*forgetting those 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*” (Philippians 3:13b-14).

The pillar of salt was a lasting memorial that God will not eternally tolerate turning back to the folly of sin,

Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

—Hebrews 10:38

The church at Ephesus had been faithful and performed many wonderful works in the name of Christ, but she too was warned of a backslidden condition:

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

—Revelation 2:4-5

Christians need not be lulled to sleep because we have served God in the past. The narrow way is to overcome through Christ and keep His works till the end (cf. Rev. 2:26). Time and again in Scripture, we are warned of this

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stubbornness of heart in refusing to be led by His mighty, yet gentle, hand.

Wonderfully, God has made it clear that if we remember and repent, He will heal us. Read God's affectionate call to His defiant people, as stated in Jeremiah 3:12-14,

Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. ¹³Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. ¹⁴Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

If you find yourself in a backslidden condition, don't think for a minute that the Lord has given up on you. God always leaves us a way to escape all manner of temptation. Our God is rich in mercy, His whole desire is to love and fellowship with us, but He knows our weak frame. Jesus taught a parable of a reckless son that fell

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into wayward sin, squandering his inheritance on riotous living, but finally remembers the care and love of his father, which led to a humble repentance.

I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, ¹⁹And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. ²⁰And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. ²¹And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. ²²But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: ²³And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: ²⁴For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

—Luke 15:18-24

This parable is a wonderful reminder of God's patient, loving ways in which he deals with His children. Note the reaction of the father—compassion, the best robe, ring on his son's hand, shoes on his son's feet, a feast

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with the best of the herd and merriment all around. Heaven rejoices over one repenting sinner. There is a particular care in which God deals with His lost sheep; He goes looking until He finds it, lays the wandering sheep on His shoulder and brings him back (cf. John 15:4-10). Even now, His Holy Spirit is striving with erring souls with a “*still, small voice*” to draw them back to the fold. Never ignore the pricking of the Holy Spirit on the heart; be thankful for it and act upon it! While we have Light, believe in the Light, that we may be the children of Light (cf. John 12:36)! What great love He has bestowed upon us that He doesn’t just let us go.

Let me hurriedly say, because God is merciful and exercises forgiveness, does not give us a license to do as we please. We are entirely wrong if we find ourselves with the attitude of,

“I can live any way I want, because—after all—
God will forgive me.”

This idea of abusing God’s wonderful grace by living in sin and even making it our daily business, should be abhorred to infinite measure. For a supporting word, we defer to the apostle Paul as he addresses this issue, with startling passion, to the church in Rome,

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*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? ²**God forbid.** How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? ³Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*

—Romans 6:1-4

The person who is truly “*in Christ*” cannot continually live in sin, because he is dead to sin. The person who lives in habitual sin, with no conscience, would have to question if they have truly come to a saving knowledge of Christ. When Christ was tempted of the devil and emerged in triumph He said, “...*Get thee hence Satan...*” (cf. Matt. 4:10); this is the true Christian attitude toward sin and its charms. Examining our own hearts and lives is certainly a task that should be exercised regularly. God’s loving-kindness toward us should never be an excuse to sin.

The harsh message of the willful backslider is something that needs to be real to every believing heart; Jesus did not waste His breath in His warnings to us.

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Backsliding is eternally costly. The Bible declares plainly, to all who are children of God, that a disobedient life will result in suffering *“loss”* (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-15). Backsliding not only hurts your own soul, it hurts all those who seek your welfare. Most of all, it hurts the Lord to His very heart. No sword was ever colder through the heart of God than to have His children go astray.

It is interesting to note that the name Hosea actually means salvation; it is another form of the name *Joshua*, whose name in its Greek rendering is *Jesus*. Like Hosea, God went out and redeemed an unfaithful wife who was enslaved in sin; with the price paid and mercy bestowed for that redemption, absolutely immeasurable. May the erring Christian pray with the old Puritan,

O Living God,

I bless thee that I can sorrow for those sins that
carry me from thee, That it is thy deep and dear
mercy to threaten punishment so that I may
return, pray, live.

—Author unknown ☞

GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. ⁶In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

—Proverbs 3:5-6



Sense of direction is critical for a man or woman to have on the long, winding road of life. The vast majority of creation does not have to put forth an effort to find direction; it is in automatic mode of sorts. All of nature—plants, animals, sea creatures and creeping insects are all born with an embedded sense of their purpose and goals in life; they know what to do, and how to do it each day of their life. Even the celestial bodies perform God's will, in such regular fashion, that man synchronizes time, seasons and annual calendars off of their dependable movements. Our days and nights would be very interesting indeed if Earth decided to rotate on its axis a little faster, or a little slower! But man is made in the "*image of God*" (cf. Gen. 1:27b), and with this lofty position comes lofty responsibility. Man has a place in the eternal purpose of the Almighty, the old creation does

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not. Man will have to give an account of himself to God, the old creation will not (cf. Rom. 14:12).

Knowing our direction makes us efficient in our goings and allows us to accomplish goals. Direction avoids making the wrong turns, wasting time, effort, and consuming vast amounts of energy while accomplishing very little. Man struggles in this area of direction having many questions, and these questions are very legitimate. Even Christian people want to know things like,

“What vocation should I undertake?”

“Where should I live?”

“Whom should I marry?”

“Where should I invest my financial resources?”

“How should I serve my church?”

With the ultimate, all encompassing question being,
“What is God’s will for my life?”

Knowing God’s will for our life seems such a complicated issue, especially when you consider all that is involved. However, the spiritual mind knows to look to the Scriptures when questions such as these arise, and it is there you will find the resolution to the mayhem of life.

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Our answer for this very emotional question is contained in our text for this message, Proverbs 3:5-6:

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.

These verses are surprisingly simple and many learn them as a child in Sunday school, but they probe the depths of mans' thoughts and intentions of the heart for the entire duration of our earthly time. These verses should cause us to look within our own heart to see where we stand today in respect to God's will. Let's take a look at what God says about receiving His direction.

HIS FOUNDATIONAL WILL

The first and most basic thing that is required of man to receive His direction is to, ***“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding.”*** (Proverbs 3:5). Faith in God is where we all must start. The very rich book of Hebrews tells us that, *“Without faith it is impossible to please Him”* (Hebrews 11:6a). Not just believe that He exists (for even the devils believe and tremble [cf. James 2:19]), but believe and trust Him to have our sins forgiven. This leads us to the record that God has given of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in

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gospel truth, even resurrection truth, in which we find the first and foremost will of God for our lives.

When the apostle Paul went to Athens, to a place called Mars Hill, he found an altar with the inscription, “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (cf. Acts 17:23). Sadly, many people still walk around with this inscription on their heart. They long to know God, long to know His will, but are ignorant (either willingly or unwillingly) of the revelation of God through Jesus Christ. Paul, with his spirit stirred within him, declared to the people of Mars Hill that God had been revealed and brought nigh unto us through the Lord Jesus Christ. He pleaded with them that they should not feel that God was unknown, for He is known, and He wants us to know about Him; it is for this very reason Jesus came. So, he preached Christ, knowing it was God’s will for these people to be saved. A supporting word comes from 2 Peter 3:9,

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

1 Timothy 2:4 goes further, as it tells us that God ...

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[Would] have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

These insightful verses tell us that it is God's will that none should perish; that He desires for all to be saved, and He is longsuffering in that endeavor. For the sake of explanation and simplicity, let's call this God's **foundational will** for all of mankind. When we are saved, Christ becomes our rock foundation which enables us to withstand the storms of life, and impending judgment to come. All other avenues that we may take in life are derived from the central truth of salvation, and a heart full of faith. Don't mistake this teaching that all will ultimately be saved. Just as man has the ability to sin and turn away from God, God has given man the freedom to turn back to Him and be redeemed through His election.

HIS REVEALED WILL

After faith has come to our lives we move on with God, just as the progression of our text leads us, "*In all thy ways **acknowledge Him...***" (Proverbs 3:6a). To know God's will for our life, we must acknowledge Him in all that we do. How do we acknowledge Him?—By obedience to His Word. After we are saved, it is God's will for us to be **sanctified**, which means separated from

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evil and drawn nigh to Him. 1 Thessalonians 4:2-3a tells us,

*For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. **For this is the will of God,** even your sanctification.*

This sanctification involves obedience to His Word, and yielding to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. For example, we know that Christ has told us to “*Love one another*” (John 3:23b); and to “... *be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you*” (Eph. 4:32). We cannot help but think of the Golden Rule, and the totality of the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matthew chapters 5-7) when we contemplate God’s will for our life.

The life that “acknowledges” the Lord is spoken of in Scripture as, “*Walking in the light.*” There is no better picture of gaining direction as that of shining a light in darkness. Peter tells us that those who have been saved have been “...*called out of darkness into His marvelous light*” (1 Peter 2:9b). Light reveals, it illuminates, and it unveils the path before us. The picture of “walking in the light” illustrates the truth of God’s revelation of His will to us when we consider the following verses,

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*Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for **he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth.***

³⁶While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.

—John 12:35-36

These verses contrast walking in the light with walking in the darkness. Christ is that Light—when we walk in the Light, we are walking with Christ. Walking with Christ gives direction. We may not know the way, but we know He **IS** the “Way” (cf. John 14:6).

Walking in the light involves fellowship with Christ Himself. If you think about it, one of the most central and basic biblical teachings for one to know God's will is to have fellowship with Jesus Christ. Jesus was very pointed when He said, “*Without me ye can do nothing*” (John 15:5b). The disciples, when they met the resurrected Christ on the road to Emmaus said, “*Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*” (Luke 24:32). The heart is illuminated by the One who is the Light of the world, with the burning of His Spirit within. The fact that Christ LIVES today means that He is able to do the same for you and

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me. We could call the believers sanctification, the **revealed will** of God.

The One we follow, blazed the trail for us in the matter of obeying God's revealed will found in His Word:

Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

—Hebrews 10:7

The whole purpose of the Savior's appearance among mankind was to do God's will; nothing more, nothing less. Jesus not only paid attention to God's Word in strict obedience, He was the Word embodied. In the verses below, we get a glimpse of His humanity as His time approached to go to the cross. Here, Jesus uses a rhetorical question which reveals the very heart of Christ, and cuts across the grain of the mindset of man,

Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify thy name.

—John 12:27-28a

Even when the knowledge of the revealed will of God troubled the heart of Christ, He yielded to His Father and merely asked that the Father's name be glorified. Likewise, there are many circumstances in life that you

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and I will face where the revealed will of God is troubling to our heart, and we would find it very easy to run the other way and do what the rest of the world would expect us to do. Yet, for the Christian, our life is not our own—it belongs to Christ—that we may yield our bodies to the revealed will of God. Such yielding reaps joy and satisfaction like nothing else known to the heart of man. Dear reader, let us not forget the way of Christ is narrow; the broad way—the easy way—is the worldly way.

How much attention have we paid to the clearly revealed will of God for us? Do we continue to ask, “What is God’s will for me?” when we have not obeyed His clearly revealed plan for us. If we do, we are just like the folks at Mars Hill with their altar to the “UNKNOWN GOD.”

I must insert at this juncture (and be very clear), that obeying the commands of Christ is not some legalistic obligation. The heart that has experienced the love of Christ wants to express the joy of salvation in obedience. Jesus said, *“If you love me, keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). Don’t think for a minute that His commandments are dreadful; we keep His commandments because we love Him. The yoke of Christ is easy and His burden is light (cf. Mat. 11:29-30);

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the yoke and burden of Christ brings rest and peace, not rigor. Once again, we find Christ as the ultimate example of abiding in the will and the love of the Father,

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. ¹⁰If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love

—*John 15:9-10*

Our obedience to Him is merely an overflow and expression of our love for Him.

HIS DIRECTIVE WILL

Moving on to those gray areas of life such as vocation, marriage and ministry; allow me to call attention to the last portion of our Scripture text, “...*he shall **direct thy paths***” (Proverbs 3:6b).

Trusting the LORD in salvation and sanctification is the key to looking away from our own understanding, and leaning on the wisdom of Heaven. After we come to this place, then we can claim the precious promise, “**He shall direct thy paths.**” Acknowledging the revealed will of God sheds light on the path of your daily life that is less sure. Your career direction, family situation,

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education and ministry decisions will become clear, at just the right time, when we are following close to the Lord—within His revealed will. We could call this His **directive will**. You will not find a passage of Scripture in the Bible that says, “Take this job,” or “Marry this person,” but you will find yourself saying with the psalmist as the way unfolds before you,

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

—*Psalm 119:105*

How neatly the Scriptures fit together for daily leading through faith and obedience. How unsearchable is His wisdom, and His ways beyond our petty knowledge. There is nothing like seeing His leading Hand at work in our life that meets needs, and satisfies our heart. The Lord Jesus nailed down the precious truths of how the priorities of His will work together in everyday life, when He said,

But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

—*Matthew 6:33*

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Let us not wonder why we are having trouble finding the Lord's will, if we do not pay attention to what He has already revealed to us in His Word. It is folly to think that the Lord is going to give us additional light, until we obey the light He has already given us. He is under no biblical obligation to do so.

We can clearly see, in just a few verses from Proverbs, that God's will is steadfastly active on our behalf; this truth should quiet our hearts, and rest our spirits. Trust in His foundational will, acknowledge His revealed will, and receive His directive will. This is not a recipe, but rather a promise from the Lord. Such a promise should make Him all the more dear to us. ✞

SOCIETY AND PRAYER

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; ²For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

—1 Timothy 2:1-2



Quietness and peace are attributes of life that most all people, even entire nations, long for. The forefathers of the United States of America certainly had this in mind when they penned some of the most well known, and eloquent, words of the Declaration of Independence:

“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”

Truly, for the peoples of a nation to have “Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness,” there must be a tranquility

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that encourages such an endeavor—that is just the way we are designed. Man cannot be happy in chaos and confusion, and the Bible tells us that this quietness and peace is to be the outcome of faithful prayer. The Lord Jesus Christ encouraged us toward faithful prayer which should not conform to our will, but to the will of God for us, “*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven*” (cf. Matt. 6:10) is the cry of the faithful heart.

The Scripture text for this message provides valuable insight as to who, and what, makes up the framework of our most basic appeals to God, including “*all men,*” whether they be of the household of faith, or not. In these verses, we find that God desires quietness, peace, godliness and honesty for all of His children who live on earth—while the wheat and the tares are growing together.

This exhortation of Paul, urges prayer for “*all men,*” and especially “*kings and all those in authority,*” for the express purpose that “*we may lead a quiet and peaceable life*”. This is not only what God desires for the present, but also the ambition of any Christian person. Peace in a nation largely is in the hands of its leaders, and peace in our own communities depends upon our own attitude toward our neighbors.

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Hearts are conditioned by prayer. Prayer for our neighbors, our national leaders, local leaders and leaders of our churches not only seeks the welfare of these, but affects the one praying by creating a heart that is tolerant of offences. Prayer brings patience and long suffering when conflicts arise in our dealings with one another, where the offending heart is humble enough to repent, and the offended heart meek enough to forgive. Nothing brings peace, quietness, godliness and honesty like a prayerful attitude that is exercised in our dealings in everyday life.

Our leaders need prayer, from the highest level in Washington D.C., to all who are in authority in our cities and towns. While we know many who rule our land do not regard the Lord or His ways, the faithful prayer of a Christian seeks to avert evil and receive the benefit of abiding under peaceful human government. Our national and local lives are affected each day by the decisions, and conduct, of those with power to have bearing on a multitude of lives. Our ability to spread the gospel, to live openly as a Christian with impunity, and attend our house of worship freely each week is dependent on prayer for our leaders—and society in general.

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Those who enforce our laws, and have authority over us, need petitions on High to deal with those who would wreak havoc, and threaten the very things that bring order and direction to society. Human government was ordained by God, after the flood of Noah, to be a terror to all who would do violence, and prayer is needed for the brave men and women who carryout this endeavor in our stead.

We are told, in the book of Ephesians, that prayer is a central part of the whole armor of God that makes us able to “*stand against the wiles of the devil*” (cf. Eph. 6:10-18). All the evils in this life are birthed from spiritual wickedness in high places, so it takes a spiritual act to counter and muster the perseverance needed to overcome. The simple life of quietness, peace, godliness and honesty is a priceless way of life, and it is certainly worth arduous prayer.

The basic biblical commands for societal life are to: “*Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king*” (1 Peter 2:17). We never honor men more than when we pray for them. We never love our brethren more than when we pray for them. We never honor the king more than when we pray for him. And we never fear God more than when we bow the knee with a thankful heart, and engage in humble soul searching

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prayer. It is love in the heart that will produce this type of practice in the life, and it is that same love that testifies to all that we are truly disciples of Jesus Christ, who is the Prince of Peace. Therefore, heeding this call to prayer is,

...good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior. ⁴Who will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

—1 Timothy 2:3-4

Being acceptable to Him is treasure that will never be corrupted or stolen away from us. It is more valuable and precious than any corruptible material thing a man could ever possess. The haughty, conceited man may think of the Lord as looking down on His creation in disinterest, somber and displeased with everything man does; this thinking is faulty. The Holy Scriptures has declared that the weakest, ignorant pauper can find him or herself in acceptable standing with the God of all creation through a contrite heart, and humble prayer. Not only this, but this thing that is acceptable to God promotes the gospel to the end that all may come unto the knowledge of the truth and be saved, even forgiven of all sin.

We seldom think in these terms, but the activity of our prayer closet has more to do with the day to day events in our communities, state and nation than we think. ☞

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