



Days of Praise

December 2020 • January • February 2021

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

December 2020 • January • February 2021

*“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”
(John 6:37)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Hebrews 1:3)

Dear Christian friend,

It is an honor to introduce these devotional thoughts to you. Several decades ago, my wife and I received this little booklet and decided to give it a try for three months. To our delight, we discovered topical devotions that consistently placed the Bible center stage. Now *Days of Praise* is a vital part of our lives, and the daily blessings continue. Back then we never envisioned the opportunity to write an introduction such as this, but “this is the LORD’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes” (Psalm 118:23).

Lela B. Long’s wonderful gospel song includes the line “Jesus is the sweetest name I know, and He’s just the same as His lovely name.” How true that is. At ICR we strive to honor the Lord Jesus, who is highly exalted and given the “name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow” (Philippians 2:9-10). We pray the Holy Spirit will use these short devotions to help you fall deeper in love with the Lord Jesus and our heavenly Father.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Randy J. Guliuzza, President

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Give the Gift of Truth This Christmas

Just as the wise Magi brought gifts to honor Jesus, so too do we give gifts during the Christmas season to those we cherish and love. The ministry of the Institute for Creation Research gives by conducting scientific research, educational programs, and media presentations that highlight the truth of creation as expressed in the Creator's perfect Word. If the ministry of ICR has blessed you this year, we invite you to prayerfully consider making a generous tax-deductible gift to support our work as we honor the Greatest Gift of all. Visit www.icr.org/give or call **800.337.0375** for more details.



Tuesday, December 1

Faithful Sayings

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” (1 Timothy 1:15)

The adjective “faithful” is usually applied either to God or to those godly men and women who remain true to their words and convictions. However, there are eight New Testament references to words (or “sayings”) that are faithful.

Six of the references to sayings that are faithful are found in Paul’s pastoral epistles as he gave counsel to young pastors Timothy and Titus, the first being our text for the day. Here are Paul’s faithful sayings: (1) “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”; (2) “If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Timothy 3:1); (3) “Bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things” (1 Timothy 4:8); (4) “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Timothy 2:11-12); (5) “They which have believed in God [should] be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). The sixth reference is a command that any “bishop” must continue “holding fast the faithful word [same as ‘saying’] as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9).

The final two references are in the Bible’s last two chapters, stressing that the words of Revelation are indeed true and believable. After stating His glorious promises for the future life, Christ told John: “Write: for these words [i.e., ‘sayings’] are true and faithful” (Revelation 21:5). Then, after the magnificent description of the Holy City, the angel said: “These sayings are faithful and true” (Revelation 22:6).

All the Bible’s sayings are true, of course, but these that are specifically called “faithful” surely warrant our special attention. HMM

The Settled Word

“Forever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.” (Psalm 119:89)

Most who read the Bible regularly are probably familiar with these sweeping statements from the Scriptures.

- “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).
- “For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18).
- “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).
- “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25).

On this foundation, the psalmist made additional promises to his Lord in this stanza (Psalm 119:89-96). He noted the affliction that almost took his life (v. 92) and the wicked who tried to destroy him (v. 95), common enough occurrences among the godly. But in spite of the troubles in life, this godly man knew that the evidence abounds for God’s faithfulness throughout the earth (vv. 90-91).

God’s 77 rhetorical questions to Job (Job 38–41) centered on the evidence of His control and care for the universe. These prompted the psalmist to reiterate his commitment to a firm familiarity with God’s precepts and a continual effort to seek them (Psalm 119:93-94).

He knew that the wicked would continue trying to destroy, and that human affairs limit the possibility of perfection. But the godly man would understand God’s testimonies, since they are sufficient to apply to all situations (v. 96). HMM III

Thursday, December 3

He Rides Upon the Heaven

“There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.”
(Deuteronomy 33:26)

Chapter 33 of Deuteronomy contains the last recorded words of a truly great man, Moses, “whom the LORD knew face to face” (34:10). Many times Moses had addressed the people of Israel with mixed blessing and warning, listing conditions for blessing and the inevitable results of rejecting God’s plan. But here, as he prepared for his impending death (32:48-52), Moses spoke only of God’s majestic character and the privileges of those who serve Him.

The God of Jeshurun (literally “upright,” here a symbolic name for Israel) is an active God, for He rides in His excellency across the heaven to help us, as we see in our text. He strongly acts on our behalf. “The eternal God is [our] refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (33:27). He is not like the gods of the heathen, who do nothing.

Next, He is a God of grandeur. Here He rides across the sky and the heaven; elsewhere we are told that He “rideth upon the heavens of heavens” (Psalm 68:33). He walks (104:3) and flies (18:10) “upon the wings of the wind.” “The LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet” (Nahum 1:3).

Finally, God is eternal. The “eternal God” with “everlasting arms” (Deuteronomy 33:27) assures us of eternal victory. “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Revelation 1:18).

Such was Moses’ God and the God whom we serve today—the One who showers us with incomparable blessings. Indeed, “who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD” (Deuteronomy 33:29) to have such a One as our God? JDM

Continue

“But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” (2 Timothy 3:14)

This encouraging exhortation by Paul is in the midst of a discouraging prophetic warning of things to come. “In the last days,” he said, “perilous times shall come” (v. 1). We may very well be entering those times, and, in any case, we do well to be alert for the signs of those times. The doleful description that follows seems to be a very accurate picture of the beliefs and practices of modern secular humanists, including those religionists who have “a form of godliness” but deny “the power thereof” (v. 5).

Moreover, there is little prospect that the situation will get better, for “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived,” and “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (vv. 13, 12). Should we, therefore, tremble and flee, or perhaps compromise, or even surrender to such powerful and persuasive deceivers?

No, we should continue! Just keep on believing and obeying God’s Word. Even in the dark last days, the “Holy Scriptures” are still able to make a man “wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (v. 15). Since they are all “given by inspiration of God,” they are still just as powerful and just as profitable for every need, “that the man of God may be perfect” (that is, ready for whatever comes) and fully equipped “unto all good works” (vv. 16-17).

Paul himself set an inspiring example of “patient continuance in well doing” (Romans 2:7) under conditions of great trial. Awaiting execution in a Roman dungeon even as he wrote, he still requested his books and parchments (2 Timothy 4:13) that he might continue to study and prepare himself. May God enable us also to continue, to remain, to abide, and to stand in His truth in these last days. HMM

Saturday, December 5

Faithful Stewards

“Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2)

God’s Word reminds us that “every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12), “for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

These and similar verses apply specifically to Christians and relate to rewards for faithful service, not to salvation. At this judgment, “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is” (1 Corinthians 3:13). The test of our works is not one of quantity, but quality.

As stewards of Christ we have been entrusted not only with various material possessions, but also with time, talents, and opportunities, as well as all the blessings of His glorious gospel. We are in fact “the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1).

“Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?” asked the Lord. “Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing” (Luke 12:42-43). But He also warned: “If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:12).

The Greek word for “faithful” means essentially “believable.” Can our Christian profession be trusted? Are we true to our word? This is what will really count when the Lord comes “to give every man according as his work shall be” (Revelation 22:12). The greatest reward, of course, will be simply to hear Him say: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord” (Matthew 25:21). HMM

Sunday, December 6

Eight Revivals

“Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?” (Psalm 85:6)

The number eight seems commonly to be associated in the Bible with a new beginning, new life, resurrection, or renewal; “seven” being the number of fullness and rest, with the seven-day week used ever since the week of creation. The Lord Jesus Himself was resurrected, never to die again, on the eighth day—that is, the first day—of the week.

It is significant, therefore, that eight great spiritual revivals are described in the Old Testament—one each under Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Asa, Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah. It is even more significant, however, that each revival was centered around the Word of God. The first, for example, was based on the giving of the law at Sinai. “And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Exodus 24:7). Then, much later when “Samuel was established to be a prophet of the LORD....And the word of Samuel came to all Israel,” eventually “all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD” (1 Samuel 3:20; 4:1; 7:2).

Analysis of all of the other revivals will reveal that they also were based on reception and acceptance of God’s Word. The last was under Nehemiah. “And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God” (Nehemiah 9:3).

There were other ingredients in these revivals, but the Word of God was always the foundation, and there can be no true and lasting revival without it. This is why it is so important in our day, when the need for revival is so desperate, that we first get back to a serious study of the Holy Scriptures, believing and obeying as best we can all that is written therein. HMM

Monday, December 7

At Ease in Zion

“Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!” (Amos 6:1)

Zion (or Jerusalem) was the capital of Judah, the southern kingdom, and Samaria was the capital of the northern kingdom, Israel. Despite the ungodliness rampant in both nations, as well as suffering due to drought and other judgments sent by God, the leaders in Zion and Samaria were still living in decadent luxury, and most people were following their example. The rustic prophet Amos was thus called by God to pronounce coming judgment on both nations and especially on their leaders.

God’s nature and God’s principles do not change. “For I am the LORD, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). If God was angry with those of His ancient people who were living in affluent ease while indifferent to the sin in the nation and in their own lives, must this not be true also in modern “Christian” America? Have evangelical Christians today become “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4)? One should at least raise the question when their churches become cathedrals and their homes become showplaces, when their music stirs their feelings but not their souls, when they spend more time in “rest and recreation” than with the Lord and His Word, and when they begin to allow “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches [to] choke the word” so that they become “unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22).

God was longsuffering with Israel, but judgment finally came to them. Perhaps He has been calling to us in the earthquake and the hurricane, the drought and the flood, the famine and the pestilence, telling us that judgment is coming. Are we at ease in Zion, saying, “Soul,...take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry” (Luke 12:19)? If so, may God stir us to repentance and rededication! HMM

Direct Access

“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” (1 Timothy 2:5)

This is one of the key verses of Scripture for several reasons. In the first place, in the midst of a pantheistic and polytheistic society governed by the kings and rulers for whom Paul had just exhorted believers to pray, it was important to reemphasize that there was only one Creator God—the One to whom even kings must give account and the only One to whom we can rightfully pray.

Secondly, Christ Jesus, who was Himself “God...manifest in the flesh” and then “received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16), was nevertheless still “the man Christ Jesus.” He is still a man, even though His human body has been resurrected and glorified. Therefore, He can, indeed, “be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” and we can “come boldly” to His “throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:15-16).

Then, because He is both omnipotent God and perfect man, “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (v. 15), He is uniquely able to serve as the one and only “mediator between God and men.” Furthermore, as the only God-man, fully and eternally both God and man, He is the only one through whom we can reach God’s throne in prayer. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” He said, “no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

No one else—man or woman, saint or priest, angel or demon—has direct access to God, for the Son is the one mediator between God and man. We can come to God, however, for “we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). HMM

Wednesday, December 9

Loving the Word

*“O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.”
(Psalm 119:97)*

This emotional stanza in Psalm 119 bursts with passion for the Word of God. “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119:103).

Previously, David’s 19th Psalm opened with praise for the “speech” and “knowledge” available in “the heaven” (Psalm 19:1-6) and gave his most open praise for the “perfect” laws (Psalm 19:7) of God that are “more to be desired...than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psalm 19:10).

The focus of this particular stanza (Psalm 119:97-104) is on the practical effect that knowledge of the Word of God has had on the psalmist’s ability to give a powerful witness.

- “Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me” (v. 98).
- “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation” (v. 99).
- “I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts” (v. 100).

The excitement that comes with the “love” and the “sweet” taste of God’s Word in a believer’s life produces an assurance that results in a readiness to “give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Peter 3:15). Indeed, since it is clear that “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal” (2 Corinthians 10:4), we should be all the more committed (as is the psalmist) to refrain “from every evil way” (Psalm 119:101), being sure that we do not depart from the “judgments” (v. 102), and that our understanding of the precepts ensures that we “hate every false way” (v. 104). HMM III

Thursday, December 10

A World of Books

“And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.” (John 21:25)

It is difficult to understand how it could be literally true that a complete biography of Christ’s works would be an earth-filling library. However, we must realize that His works did not end with His return to heaven. The events of His 33 years on Earth were only what “Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). When He prayed, it was not only for His 12 disciples, “but for them also which shall believe on me through their word” (John 17:20). When He sent the Holy Spirit, it was so that each believer could know that “Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20) and that by His Spirit, He could fulfill His promise: “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28:20). He also promised to “build my church” (Matthew 16:18) in which each believer becomes a member of “his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:23).

Thus, the life and work of every believing Christian is, in a very real sense, an extension of the life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and an endless series of thrilling biographies could be written about them. In fact, the apostle Paul referred to his Christian converts as living books: “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:2-3).

Each of our own lives, therefore, becomes one of “the books that should be written” about the “things which Jesus did.” How important it is that the deeds and words we record in our books are worthy of our divine Biographer! JDM

Friday, December 11

Unto Him That Is Able

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.” (Jude 1:24)

There are three wonderful doxologies in three New Testament epistles extolling the transcendent ability of God to accomplish and perfect our eternal salvation. One is our text above, assuring all who are “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 1:21) that He is fully able to bring us joyfully into the presence of God in glory.

Then, look at Ephesians 3:20: “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” Furthermore, His power is able to keep us forever. “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Romans 16:25).

Little wonder that the apostles exhort us to praise such a wonderful God and Savior! But in addition to the three doxologies, the Word of God contains many other testimonies to the omnipotent ability of the Lord on behalf of His people. “He is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). “The Lord Jesus Christ:...shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

With such a Savior and heavenly Father, we can join with Jude as he concludes his doxology: “To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:25). HMM

Saturday, December 12

How to Keep from Falling

“For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?” (Psalm 56:13)

Once a person receives Christ as Savior, he must begin, then continue, in the Christian life. There will be many temptations along the way, however, as well as many pressures to recant, many sorrows, many difficulties. How is the “babe” in Christ to keep from stumbling and falling?

The answer, of course, is that we are kept by the same grace that saved us in the first place! The Lord Jesus died to save us from eternal death in hell; surely we can “be saved by his life” from falling while living (Romans 5:10). Our beautiful text verse anticipates this great New Testament truth. If the Lord can deliver my soul from death, surely He can keep my feet from falling! Other wonderful verses in the Psalms give the same assurance. For example: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand” (Psalm 37:23-24).

It is important, of course, that each person professing faith in Christ be sure that his faith is real, founded on the true Jesus Christ as Creator, Redeemer, and Lord, not a sentimental faith in “another Jesus,...or another gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4). As Peter urges: “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Peter 1:10).

And then, in the last words of the New Testament before the book of Revelation, we are directed again to Christ. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25). What a blessed assurance is this! HMM

Sunday, December 13

Life in the Blood

*“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)*

This great verse contains a wealth of scientific and spiritual truth. It was not realized until the discovery of the circulation of the blood by the creation scientist William Harvey, in about 1620, that biological “life” really is maintained by the blood, which both brings nourishment to all parts of the body and also carries away its wastes.

Its spiritual truth is even more significant. The blood, when shed on the altar, would serve as an “atonement” (literally “covering”) for the soul of the guilty sinner making the offering. In fact, the “life” of the flesh is actually its “soul,” for “life” and “soul” both translate the same Hebrew word (*nephesh*) in this text. When the blood was offered, it was thus an offering of life itself in substitution for the life of the sinner who deserved to die.

Human sacrifices, of course, were prohibited. No man could die for another man, for his blood would inevitably be contaminated by his own sin. Therefore, the blood of a “clean animal” was required. Animals do not possess the “image of God” (Genesis 1:27), including the ability to reason about right and wrong, and therefore cannot sin. Even such clean blood could only serve as a temporary covering, and it could not really “take away” sin. For a permanent solution to the sin problem, nothing less was required than that of the sinless “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:12). Since His life was in His blood, He has “made peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). HMM

Light from the Word

*“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”
(Psalm 119:105)*

One of the more beautiful metaphors in the Bible, “light” is used either metaphorically or literally to stress understanding, knowledge, or truth. When inaccurate interpretations of God’s Word are taught, Isaiah said it is “because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). Peter noted that prophetic insight is like “light that shineth in a dark place” (2 Peter 1:19).

One of the Lord’s most memorable statements was “I am the light of the world” (John 8:12). Little wonder, then, that in this majestic psalm centering on the Word of God, this stanza (Psalm 119:105-112) acknowledges the role executed by the Scriptures “as the light that goeth forth” (Hosea 6:5).

The psalmist again mentioned his affliction (v. 107) and that his soul was constantly “in my hand” (Psalm 119:107, a Hebrew idiom for constant danger; see 1 Samuel 28:21). But nonetheless, his instant reaction was to focus on the “righteous judgments” of God and a promise to “not forget thy law” (Psalm 119:109). He begged for the Lord to teach him God’s “judgments” (v. 108) and promised not to err “from thy precepts” (v. 110).

Thus, woven throughout the stanza are the constant paradoxical tensions of supplication for relief from the wicked efforts to “snare” him (see 2 Timothy 2:26) and the confidence that whatever conditions may develop, the written Word of God would provide answers. Those words are “the rejoicing” of his heart (119:111), much like when David sang, “Let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD” (Psalm 105:3).

Finally, in the last line of this stanza, the psalmist challenged us to embrace his own commitment to the Word of God as he wrote, “I have inclined mine heart to perform thy statutes alway, even unto the end” (Psalm 119:112). HMM III

Tuesday, December 15

The Urgency of Salvation

“For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”
(2 Corinthians 6:2)

Perhaps the most deadly sin of the unbeliever is that of procrastination. Satisfied with his current life, he neglects his spiritual need. Even if he understands the gospel and realizes his need of salvation, he still puts off a decision.

But it is always dangerous to count too strongly on tomorrow. “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). The sin of procrastination may easily become the sin of negligence, then of indifference, and finally the unforgivable sin of irrevocable rejection and unbelief. “My spirit shall not always strive with man” (Genesis 6:3). This warning was true in the antediluvian world and it is certainly as true today, when we have far more knowledge and evidence of God’s truth and His will than people did in the days of Noah.

“To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart” (Psalm 95:7-8). This warning of the psalmist was considered so important that the writer of Hebrews quoted it three times (Hebrews 3:7-8, 15; 4:7). Such an emphasis suggests there is indeed great danger in resisting God’s call to salvation. There may be another opportunity, but it is presumptuous and dangerous to impose too long on God’s patient mercy.

Today is the day of salvation. The accepted time is now! “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?...It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebrews 10:29, 31). HMM

Shielded by the Word

“I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love. Thou art my hiding place and my shield: I hope in thy word.” (Psalm 119:113-114)

The Bible is replete with military imagery. We are told to “wrestle” against the “spiritual wickedness in high places” and to be sure that we put on “the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:12-13). As the good soldiers of the King, we are told to “endure hardness” (2 Timothy 2:3) and expected, as His army, to be about the “pulling down of strong holds” (2 Corinthians 10:4).

David was a warrior king, and many of his psalms contain battle terms used both literally and figuratively to show the way God protects and provides for us in spiritual warfare. The “hiding place” David often mentioned was a secret retreat that provided shelter from the enemy (Psalm 32:7). The “shield” can refer to the same sort of retreat but is most often used to describe a soldier’s defensive buckler. Faith is our shield in spiritual warfare (Ephesians 6:16).

Thus, in this stanza (Psalm 119:113-120), the psalmist visualized God in the role of Protector and Captain. He looked to God for his life while being upheld “according unto thy word” (v. 116). Safety was no doubt prominent in his thoughts while affirming that he had continual respect for God’s statutes (v. 117).

The psalmist was also fearfully aware of God’s take-no-prisoners attitude toward those who are against Him (vv. 118-119). While our gracious Lord and King is patient toward all sinners, His ultimate plan is to “put down all rule and all authority and power” (1 Corinthians 15:24). Knowing this, the psalmist concluded: “My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments” (Psalm 119:120). Only a fool refuses to fear the Creator’s wrath. HMM III

Thursday, December 17

Cursed or Blessed

“Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.” (Jeremiah 17:5)

Jeremiah provides for us a striking contrast between the self-assured humanist and the one who has placed his trust in God. The man who looks to his own abilities or those of others to save him in time of trouble is “cursed.” His existence will be one of futility, just as is that of a parched desert plant (v. 6). Why? Because his “heart departeth from the LORD” (v. 5), the source of strength and salvation.

Jeremiah uses a play on words here. The words for “man” in our text are different: the first means “warrior” or “strong man,” and the second a “normal man.” The warrior who should be strong is cursed because he is trusting in one who is weak; in this case, any other man’s wisdom or might, or even his own strength, when overestimated. What sense is there in that?

In contrast, “blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD” (v. 7). “He shall be as a tree planted by the waters,...and shall not be careful [i.e., anxious] in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit” (v. 8). Why? Because his “hope the LORD is” (v. 7). We see the warrior—one who might be considered strong—trusting solely in the true “strong man,” the Lord.

It is a tragic fact that even many Christians fall into the mindset of the autonomous humanist and attempt to live their lives (even “the Christian life”) under their own power. Do we trust in our own feeble power or in the Lord? Every heart, whether humanist or Christian, “is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (v. 9). Make no mistake! “I the LORD search the heart” (v. 10); He knows our inner motives. Let us recommit ourselves to trust in the Lord and make Him our hope. JDM

Friday, December 18

Fringe Issues

“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient.” (2 Timothy 2:24)

One of the plagues of modern-day Christendom is that many take up side issues and deem them all-important—a point of separation between them and other Christians. Health foods, dress codes, and church constitutions are not unimportant, but Christians can hold different opinions and still be walking with God. Note the scriptural admonitions: “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace [i.e., primary issues]; not with meats [i.e., fringe issues], which have not profited them that have been occupied therein” (Hebrews 13:9); “foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Timothy 2:23).

On the other hand, there are many scriptural commands to hold “fast the faithful word” (Titus 1:9); to “keep that which is committed to thy trust” (1 Timothy 6:20). Many of these points of “sound doctrine” (Titus 1:9) are absolutely essential, such as the deity of Christ, the authority of Scripture, salvation by grace, the resurrection of Christ, and many others clearly and specifically taught in Scripture. Perhaps the rule might be, if it’s an essential doctrine, teach and defend it at all costs; if it’s a secondary doctrine, teach it in “meekness” and love (2 Timothy 2:25). But if it’s a fringe issue, avoid strife over it, allowing brothers to exercise their freedom.

Is creationism a fringe issue? No! Few doctrines are so clearly taught in Scripture. Is it crucial to salvation? No! But it is essential to adequately understand the great primary doctrines for it is foundational to them all. Furthermore, it is the subject of origins, which the enemy has identified as a major battleground, vowing to destroy Christianity over this issue. Here we must stand if we are to guard our faith. JDM

Saturday, December 19

Science—True and False

“And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 2:9)

It is significant that the first reference to “science” in the Bible is in connection with the tree of the “science” of good and evil. The English word “science” comes from the Latin *scientia*, meaning “knowledge.” In both Old and New Testaments, “science” and “knowledge” translate the same Greek and Hebrew words respectively. Science—properly speaking—is what we know, not naturalistic speculation (as in evolutionary “science”). Adam and Eve knew a great deal about God and His creation, and all of it was “very good” (Genesis 1:31); they did not need to have a knowledge of evil, and God warned them against it (2:17).

But they partook of the evil tree anyway, and therewith *evil* knowledge entered the hearts and minds of mankind. Throughout the long ages since, true science has been of great good in the world and false science has wrought great harm. The apostle Paul has warned us against it: “Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called” (1 Timothy 6:20). In the context of the times, Paul was specifically warning against the evolutionary pantheism of the gnostic philosophers.

In contrast, the final climactic reference in the Bible to knowledge is Peter’s exhortation to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7), and in Jesus Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3). Therefore, let us resolve to eschew the knowledge of evil and grow in the knowledge of Christ! HMM

Keep Alive Thy Work

“O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.” (Habakkuk 3:2)

Habakkuk had long been grieved by the apostasy and injustice in Judah. A sensitive man who trusted God completely, he could not understand why God allowed such rampant sin to go unpunished. Knowing God must have a reason for His actions, he asked in faith the question “Why?” (1:3).

In love God honors Habakkuk’s sincere question, but the answer caused him even greater concern: “For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not their’s” (v. 6). God intended to use the vicious Babylonians to punish His chosen people (vv. 5-11).

This prompted the prophet’s second question, “How?” How could God use such an evil people to punish the Jews (1:12–2:1)? God patiently explained that Israel’s sins merited captivity, and furthermore that Babylon’s sins would eventually be punished also.

Once Habakkuk knew God’s plan, he did not dispute it. Rather, his concern turned to his people—soon to be in captivity. He was afraid they would lose all knowledge of God in a heathen culture, and he prayed, “O LORD, revive thy work” (3:2, literally “keep alive thy work”). This concern was answered by a majestic appearance of the pre-incarnate Christ (vv. 3-15), through which Habakkuk understood that God would indeed judge His enemies (v. 12) and deliver His people (v. 13).

Habakkuk’s final response? Total submission to God’s sovereign control over all things. He claims that in spite of these overwhelming problems (3:18), “yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” JDM

Monday, December 21

Origin of the Races

“These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.” (Genesis 10:32)

This is the concluding verse of the tenth chapter of Genesis, known as “The Table of Nations.” It tells us that all the original nations of the world were formed from the descendants of Noah. The basis of this worldwide division was their dispersion at Babel (Genesis 11:9), “every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations” (Genesis 10:5; see also 10:20 and 10:31). Lest anyone think this list of original nations is simply folklore, he should remember that William F. Albright, probably the greatest archaeologist of the 20th century, called it “an astonishingly accurate document.” Many ethnologists still speak of Japhetic, Hamitic, and Semitic peoples and languages.

But what about the origin of races? One searches the Bible in vain for this information, for neither the word nor the *concept* of “race” appears in the Bible at all! There is no such thing as a race—except the human race! Skin color and other supposed racial characteristics are mere recombinations of innate genetic factors, originally created in Adam and Eve to permit development of different family characteristics as the human race was commanded to multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28; 9:1).

“Race” is strictly an evolutionary concept used by Darwin, Huxley, Haeckel, and the other 19th-century evolutionists to rationalize their white racism. But from the beginning it was not so! “God that made the world and all things therein;... hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:24, 26). “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?” (Malachi 2:10). HMM

Tuesday, December 22

Mind Control

“This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.” (Ephesians 4:17-18)

A question that troubles many Christians is why most highly educated leaders in science and other fields—even theologians—seem to find it so difficult to believe the Bible and the gospel of Christ. The answer is in the words of our text: They are “alienated from the life of God” because of self-induced ignorance. It is not that they can’t understand, but that they won’t understand! They “walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened...because of the blindness of their heart.” They don’t want to believe in their hearts, therefore they seek an excuse not to believe in their minds. They are “men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Timothy 3:8).

The sad truth is that Satan himself controls their minds. They may be ever so intelligent in secular matters, but the gospel, with all its comprehensive and beautiful simplicity, remains hidden to them. “If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

Is there a remedy? Yes. “(For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5). In this verse, the word “thought” is the same as “mind.” The weapons of truth, of prayer, of love, and of the Spirit can capture even such minds as these! HMM

Wednesday, December 23

God with Us

“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD.” (Genesis 4:1)

Here is Eve’s testimony concerning the first child born to the human race. To understand it, we need to recall God’s first promise: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; [He] shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15). These words, addressed to Satan, promised that the woman’s “seed” would destroy Satan. Thus, that seed would have to be a man, but the only one capable of destroying Satan is God Himself. Eve mistakenly thought that Cain would fulfill this promise, and when he was born, she testified: “I have gotten a man—even the LORD” (literal rendering).

Over three millennia later, essentially the same promise was renewed to the “house of David,” when the Lord said: “Behold, [the] virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:13-14). The definite article reflects the primeval promise that the divine/human Savior, when He comes, would be born uniquely as the woman’s seed, not of the father’s seed like all other men. His very name, Immanuel, means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). He is “the Word...made flesh” (John 1:14).

While questions have been raised about the precise meaning of *almah* (Hebrew word translated “virgin”), there is no question in the New Testament: “Behold, [the] virgin [Greek *parthenos*, meaning virgin and nothing else] shall be with child” (Matthew 1:23). “When the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman” (Galatians 4:4). “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14). HMM

Thursday, December 24

Mary and the Grace of God

“And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.” (Luke 1:30)

This announcement by the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary, that she had been chosen as the mother of the coming Savior, contains the first mention in the New Testament of the Greek word for grace (*charis*). Mary was chosen, not for anything she had done, but because she had “found grace.”

In a remarkable parallel, certainly implying divine inspiration, the first mention of grace in the Old Testament is also associated with the coming of a new dispensation in God’s dealings with men. “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8).

Just as Mary found grace, so Noah had found grace. Grace is not something one earns or purchases; grace is a treasure that is found! When a person finally realizes that salvation is only by the grace of God, received through faith in the saving work of Christ, he or she has made the greatest discovery that could ever be made, for it brings eternal life.

But there is an even greater dimension to the grace of God. When we do “find” grace, it is actually because God in His infinitely precious grace has found us and revealed to us the Savior of our souls. Just as God found Moses in the desert and found Paul on the road to Damascus, then saved and called them to His service, so He finds us, and then we also find His saving grace.

Mary’s discovery of God’s grace in salvation, through the coming of the “seed of the woman” into the world, is revealed in her Magnificat: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (Luke 1:46-47). This could well have also been the testimony of Noah long ago, and it surely should be the testimony of each of us who has found grace today. HMM

Friday, December 25

God Gave Himself

“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.” (John 3:16)

It is singularly appropriate that we look at this greatest of all verses on Christmas Day, for it records the greatest of all gifts. The theme of giving is very prominent in the Bible, with such words as “give,” “gift,” “gave,” etc., occurring more than 2,100 times. The first is Genesis 1:16-17 when God created the sun, moon, and stars “to give light upon the earth,” and the last is Revelation 22:12 when Christ will return with His rewards to “give every man according as his work shall be.” “He...gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons,” as well as “life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 14:17; 17:25).

But the greatest gift, clearly, was when God gave Himself for a lost and undeserving world. It was the greatest gift because it met the greatest need, revealed the greatest love, and had the greatest scope and purpose of any gift that could ever be conceived in the heart of an omniscient Creator.

That was not the end of His giving, of course. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). “Trust...in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17).

This great gift of God is abundantly sufficient to provide salvation and everlasting life for the whole world. But a gift only becomes a gift when it is accepted, and the greatest of all tragedies is that this greatest of all gifts has been spurned and even ridiculed, or—worst of all—simply ignored by multitudes who need it so much. When they brazenly refuse God’s free gift of everlasting life, they can only perish in everlasting death. God did all He could do when He gave His Son; for when He gave His Son, He gave Himself. HMM

The Trinity in Ephesians

“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

Paul’s letter to the church at Ephesus is surely one of the most profoundly doctrinal—yet intensely practical—books of the Bible, and it is not surprising that the doctrine of the triune God breaks into his message so frequently. For example, note Ephesians 2:18: “For through [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”

More often, however, it appears not in a succinct formula like this but rather in interconnected references to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, always implying that each is deity, but never that they are three *different* “gods.” Paul prayed that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him” (Ephesians 1:17).

He also prayed “unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,... That he would grant you,...to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Ephesians 3:14, 16-17). Thus, the believer is “filled with all the fulness of God” (v. 19).

We are exhorted to “grieve not the holy Spirit of God,...even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:30, 32). And “be filled with the Spirit;...Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Ephesians 5:18, 20).

There are others, but note especially our text, speaking of our unity in Him and His triunity in us. “There is...one Spirit...One Lord,...One God and Father of all, who is above all [i.e., the Father], and through all [the Son], and in you all [the Spirit].” All this is a magnificent mystery, but a wonderful reality! HMM

Sunday, December 27

Judgment from the Word

“I have done judgment and justice: leave me not to mine oppressors.” (Psalm 119:121)

The Hebrew word *mishpat* is one of the eight terms used in Psalm 119 to identify the Word of God. The psalmist used *mishpat* in the opening of this stanza (Psalm 119:121-128) to declare obedience to God’s “judgments”—especially regarding those who oppress the Lord’s people.

Sometimes the Lord seems to delay action against those who rebel against truth. The prophet Habakkuk lived during such a time:

O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!
even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!...for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth. (Habakkuk 1:2-4)

During such times, we need “surety” (Psalm 119:122) from God to strengthen our minds. Paul warned Timothy of “perilous times” (2 Timothy 3:1) ahead but also reminded him of God’s pledge: “They shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as their’s also was” (2 Timothy 3:9).

After pleading his case, the psalmist stated: “It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law” (Psalm 119:126). He expressed his love for the commandments—exceeding his desire for wealth—and concluded: “Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:128). May our hearts be as resolute and as strong amid our opposition. Make it so, Lord Jesus. HMM III

Keeping and Avoiding

“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called.” (1 Timothy 6:20)

Note that there are contained here both positive and negative charges. Timothy, Paul’s son in the faith, is instructed to keep certain things and avoid others. The word “keep” is a military word that might better be translated “guard.” The word “avoid” implies more than merely refraining from contact. It has to do, instead, with actively and deliberately turning away from something.

Timothy is to guard that which has been committed into his care—by inference, something quite valuable—the complete gospel of Jesus Christ. “Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost” (2 Timothy 1:13-14).

Paul knew, however, that in order to guard the truth, Timothy must actively avoid the false, and lists three specific potential pitfalls. The first is profane babbling, i.e., any of those conversations and arguments that are of a worldly, ungodly, unclean nature. Next, he is to avoid vain, empty, hollow arguments. Elsewhere, Paul teaches “shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:16).

Lastly, he is to avoid the opposing arguments of false science, or knowledge. Human wisdom found to be contrary to the wisdom of God may be called knowledge by some, but if so, it is “falsely so called.” Even “some professing [Christians] have erred concerning the faith” (1 Timothy 6:21).

Paul closes with the benediction “Grace be with thee.” May we all enjoy God’s grace as we attempt to keep the true, avoid the false, and discern the difference. JDM

Tuesday, December 29

True Education

“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.” (Genesis 18:19)

This is a very important verse comprising the first direct reference in the Bible to what we today would call education, and it is given in connection with God’s approving testimony concerning Abraham. Note that nothing is said concerning degrees or diplomas, the sciences or humanities, school buildings or textbooks.

It does tell us that God’s highest priority in the training of the young is that they learn to “keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment.” Such instruction is the responsibility of the home—not of the government or some educational association. It is to be given in the context of God’s promises and plans (thus in the context of divine revelation) and is to be framed in terms of “commands.”

This is also the teaching of the New Testament: “Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The Bible never refers to “education,” but there are many references to teaching, learning, and instruction. There are no references to teaching under the sponsorship of the government, however. As far as biblical precepts and examples are concerned, teaching the young is strictly a function of the home and the church (this could no doubt include several homes and churches cooperating in the provision of advanced or specialized instruction). Most importantly, all instruction, in every subject, should be governed by biblical criteria, for “all Scripture...is profitable...for instruction....That the man of God may be perfect [i.e., ‘fully prepared’]” (2 Timothy 3:16-17) for the work God wants him to do. HMM

Wednesday, December 30

Wonder at the Word

“Thy testimonies are wonderful: therefore doth my soul keep them.” (Psalm 119:129)

Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah. His grandfather was Manassah and his father Amon, both evil kings. While it seemed Josiah would follow the same path, he didn't. “He did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left” (2 Chronicles 34:2). What made such a difference?

As the text above testifies, Josiah found wonder in God's Word. When Josiah was a young man (age 26), a godly leader read to him the law (*torah*), which engaged his soul.

And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant which are written in this book. (2 Chronicles 34:31)

Such was the case of the psalmist. The earlier portions of Psalm 119 declare the good that he had done, but now his soul was motivated. He longed (v. 131) and cried for direction and help from the Lord: “Look thou upon me, and...Order my steps in thy word....Deliver me from the oppression of man....Make thy face to shine upon thy servant” (vv. 132-135).

These unselfish prayers were each coupled with a promise to obey. With his heart and correct behavior involved, the psalmist wept for those who “keep not thy law” (v. 136). When the hearts of God's people break because of sin, revival comes (2 Chronicles 7:14). HMM III

Thursday, December 31

Loaded with Blessing

“Blessed be the LORD, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.” (Psalm 68:19)

As we come to this year’s end, it is salutary for the believer to think back over the days of the year and to meditate upon his blessings. He may, indeed, have experienced defeats and losses, disappointments and injuries in great number. If he is honest with himself, however, the Christian will always have to acknowledge that his blessings far outweigh his burdens. God “loadeth us with benefits,” and is even working in and through all the trials and hurtful things together for our good (Romans 8:28).

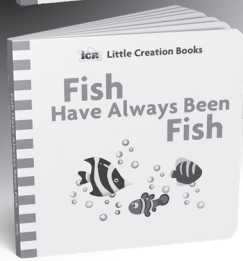
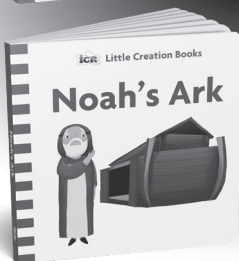
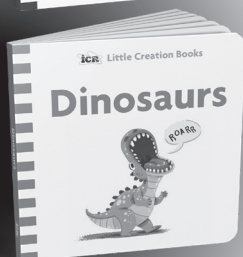
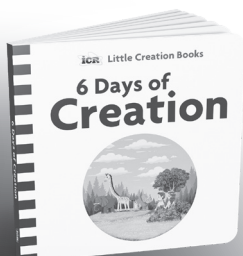
In our text verse, the words “with benefits” have been supplied by the translators. Some might, therefore, conclude that the verse could mean that God is daily loading us with burdens instead of benefits. The context, however, assures us that the emphasis is really on His blessings. For that matter, even a burden can become a blessing if we take it as a gift from God for our spiritual benefit.

Therefore: “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits” (Psalm 103:2). “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

He has given us “life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). Far more importantly, He is “the God of our salvation.” Whatever else we have, or don’t have, in this life, we have the great gift of eternal life, through faith in Christ and His finished work of redemption. We have it every day of the year and are daily ready to meet the Lord, whenever He calls. Each day we have the indwelling presence of His Spirit, the illuminating guidance of His Word, the daily provision of all real needs, and the assurance of His love. He has surely loaded us with benefits! HMM

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Friday, January 1

A Fresh Start

“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24)

Everyone deserves a fresh start. As we start the New Year with resolutions and lofty ideals, it is good to remember that we can all renew our commitment. We can all purpose to gain even loftier heights in our spiritual journey toward Christ-likeness. No matter how far we have ascended, we can go farther; no matter how low we have fallen, we can begin again.

How can this be accomplished? As the context of our text teaches, we must go back to school—the school of Christ. “But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:20-21). “Take 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 11:29).

As our text verses explain, we must both “put off...the old man” and “put on the new man,” clearly speaking of our manner of life, just as if we were changing clothes. If we as believers are hanging on to a few old rags, let this New Year see us obey this passage as an act of faith through the living Spirit of God: “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13:14).

This act of submission and desire will result as we are “renewed in the spirit [or attitude] of [our minds]” (Ephesians 4:23). The old man will not be removed or changed into the new but will be brought under control. The new man is a new creation of God modeled after Him “in righteousness and true holiness.” “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). JDM

Saturday, January 2

The Golden Rule

“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 7:12)

This command of Christ is the famous so-called Golden Rule of conduct. As He said, it succinctly summarizes and crystallizes all the instructions given in the Old Testament Scriptures dealing with human interrelationships. In fact, somewhat similar guidelines can be found even in certain ancient extra-biblical writings.

It should be stressed, however, that this maxim is not meant to be a prerequisite for salvation. No mere human being ever obeys this rule perfectly, any more than one can keep perfectly the Ten Commandments.

It was included by Christ as a part of what is known as the Sermon on the Mount, which the Bible clearly states was a series of instructions given only to believers—that is, to people already saved through personal faith in Christ. At the very beginning of this “sermon,” it says clearly that “seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And he opened his mouth, and taught them” (Matthew 5:1-2).

Thus, the Golden Rule is only for Christian believers. It is a standard by which we should seek to order our personal lives, not to be saved, but because we are saved. “Be ye therefore perfect,” said the Lord, “even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). No one—except Christ Himself, in His humanity—has ever perfectly kept the Golden Rule or been sinlessly perfect (note 1 John 1:8, 10). Nevertheless, our standard can be nothing less. “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect,” said the apostle Paul: “but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12). And so should we. HMM

Sunday, January 3

Salvation in the Spirit

“Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” (John 3:5)

Nicodemus was confused the night when Jesus first spoke of the necessity of the new birth and then equated it with the symbol of baptism. Christ then indicated that the reality in both was the supernatural work of God, the Holy Spirit. “Except a man be born of water [that is, the Spirit], he cannot enter into the kingdom of God [with ‘and’ understood as ‘even’].”

The miracle of regeneration is thus a work of the Spirit, and just as “the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). It is not some soul-winning methodology but the Holy Spirit who does the work, and He (like the invisible wind) may work in a great variety of different ways.

This work of the Holy Spirit in bringing salvation to the unsaved is so great and so complex that it must be described in a variety of figures to convey the whole reality. In the first place, He must bring conviction of sin and the need of salvation. “When he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

Then, as the sinner repents and believes on Christ, the Spirit baptizes him into Christ. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). As a member of Christ’s body, he is made a partaker of His resurrection life. Simultaneously, “after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13), and “the Spirit of God dwelleth in you” (1 Corinthians 3:16). All of this becomes the mighty miracle of spiritual birth. “According to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). HMM

Monday, January 4

Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.” (John 15:13-14)

Hymns sometimes lift our souls to heights undreamed of. Let us use the familiar hymn “Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners” these next few days to take us into scriptural truth. The refrain that accompanies each verse follows.

*Hallelujah! what a Savior!
Hallelujah! what a Friend!
Saving, helping, keeping, loving,
He is with me to the end.*

Hallelujah is sometimes translated “praise ye the Lord.” Praising God is a precious privilege to Christians. The Psalms often give praise to our great Lord and King, and this will continue throughout eternity. “And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God” (Revelation 19:1).

He is saving us from sin and its penalty. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Hebrews 7:25), helping us in our journey through life. “Therefore in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice” (Psalm 63:7). Through any peril, He is keeping us “by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5) while loving us through it. In fact, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

We can be confident that He will keep us for all time. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25). JDM

Tuesday, January 5

My Savior Makes Me Whole

“Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.” (Isaiah 40:26)

The hymn “Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners” mentions the frequent failure of our friends and the persistent opposition of our enemies. Conversely, Jesus Christ, who loves us completely, never fails. “For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Hebrews 13:5).

*Jesus! what a Friend for sinners!
Jesus! Lover of my soul;
Friends may fail me, foes assail me,
He, my Savior, makes me whole.*

The hymnist was not writing for believers only but also for those who still reject God’s gift of salvation. Jesus loves them and came to Earth on their behalf. A favorite Scripture reminds us “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” (John 3:16). Abraham was one of those who loved and believed God, “and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God” (James 2:23).

Christ taught His disciples that He would soon die, but they didn’t believe. Jesus taught them that “greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13), and “ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (v. 14). They were growing in the understanding that He was God Himself. “Henceforth I call you not servants...but I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

Later, John wrote they were more than friends. “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). JDM

My Strength and Victory

“And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” (2 Corinthians 12:9)

“Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners” verse two highlights His attribute of strength. David wrote of encountering and benefitting from it when he hid safely in Him. “For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion: in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me up upon a rock” (Psalm 27:5).

*Jesus! what a Strength in weakness!
Let me hide myself in Him;
Tempted, tried, and sometimes failing,
He, my Strength, my vict'ry wins.*

In times of opposition, we can go to Him for comfort and protection. In Psalm 23:4, we are comforted to read, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” We can likewise pass this along to bolster others in need, for “we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:4).

When conflict comes, our Friend for sinners provides a way out. “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Ultimately, victory is ours through His great strength and wisdom. In eternal glory, we are told that “now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10). Forever we will hide safely in Him. JDM

Thursday, January 7

A Help in Sorrow

“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (Isaiah 35:10)

Christians have received great joy and hope for the future, but make no mistake, there are troubles in this life. Christ promised that even if we “weep and lament...your sorrow shall be turned into joy” (John 16:20). The third verse of “Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners” expresses this well.

*Jesus! what a Help in sorrow!
While the billows o'er me roll,
Even when my heart is breaking,
He, my Comfort, helps my soul.*

Our text shows that even when Israel was about to be captured and exiled, Isaiah still anticipated their return and ultimate victory. “Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away” (Isaiah 51:11).

In this life He has not left us without comfort, for Christ promised His disciples, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Even when death and separation are imminent, “I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

And in the next life, the “forever” life, “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 21:4). JDM

Guide and Keeper

“For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name’s sake lead me, and guide me.” (Psalm 31:3)

David wrote often about the trials of life, but he leaned on a wise and good Guide for deliverance. The next verses tell of the grave danger ahead and David’s resolve: “Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me: for thou art my strength. Into thine hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth” (vv. 4-5). “Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners” addresses that in its fourth stanza.

*Jesus! what a Guide and Keeper!
While the tempest still is high,
Storms about me, night o’ertakes me,
He, my Pilot, hears my cry.*

There was a time in the gospels when the disciples were overwhelmed by a tempest, but Jesus Christ, their Guide and Keeper, calmed the sea and rescued them. “There arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves....Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm” (Matthew 8:24-26). This was one of their first indications He was more than a mere man. “What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!” (v. 27).

Sailors know the value of a wise and experienced pilot who can guide their ship into safe harbor. In an analogous way, Christ and His Spirit can keep us from ruin—human, natural, or spiritual. Christ promised, “When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). We are safe in His care.

The Old Testament contains the precious truth “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee” (Isaiah 26:3). We have the assurance that “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). JDM

Saturday, January 9

Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

“To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

The last six words of this text have been the theme of many sermons, and surely they are worth our study, for the concept is used throughout Scripture. They also are included in the final verse of “Jesus! What a Friend for Sinners.”

*Jesus! I do now receive Him,
More than all in Him I find;
Christ in me, the Hope of glory,
I am His, and He is mine.*

Christ does indeed live in each believer and fills and controls as allowed by the individual. But for those filled with His abundance, He provides the certain “hope” of glory. We have assurance of salvation, adoption, grace, Spirit-filled life, and eternal glory as we are in Christ. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

Scripture specifically teaches that God loves sinners as they are and moves as a gracious “Friend” to pay the penalty for their sin. “If thou shalt...believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Romans 10:9).

The words “believe” and “receive,” while not the same, can often be used interchangeably in Scripture. Once we truly believe, we can receive Him, for when we believe we simultaneously receive God’s forgiveness and salvation. And we can affirm, “I am His, and He is mine.” His sweet “friendship” will last for all time. JDM

Sunday, January 10

Touch Not Mine Anointed

“And [David] said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.” (1 Samuel 24:6)

These words have been widely misappropriated in later times as a warning to any who would presume to question or rebuke an erring pastor or other Christian leader. In the theocracy of Israel, there were three groups of men specially chosen by God and then anointed for their offices—prophets, priests, and kings—and God indeed “suffered no man to do them wrong” (Psalm 105:14). However, all three offices were completely fulfilled in Christ. The Levitical priesthood has been abolished, and Christ is our eternal high priest. The prophetic office ceased with the completion of the Scriptures, and Christ has inherited David’s throne forever.

As far as New Testament anointing is concerned, this is now accomplished in every true believer. “Now he which... hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). No longer are we dependent on special instruction and guidance from priests and prophets, for we have the inerrant, infallible, written Word of God and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. “The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him” (1 John 2:27).

Christians can, and should, learn and grow spiritually from godly teachers of the Word and faithful pastors of the flock, but all—leaders as well as learners—must continually be subject to correction from God’s Word, “neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3). HMM

Monday, January 11

Many Books

“And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh.” (Ecclesiastes 12:12)

It seems amazing, at first, that we should be reading a complaint from almost 3,000 years ago that too many books were already being published. The greatest book, of course, is the collection of 66 books known as the Bible—that is, the Book (which is the meaning of “Bible”). This Book has been “for ever...settled in heaven” and “endureth for ever” (Psalm 119:89, 160).

The first mention of “book” in the Bible is found in Genesis 5:1: “This is the book of the generations of Adam.” Similarly, the first mention of “book” in the New Testament is Matthew 1:1: “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ.” These “books” are now incorporated into the Book and, in a striking way, emphasize the continuity of Old and New Testaments—the one dealing with the first Adam, the other with the last Adam.

The final mentions of “book” also are very important, again dealing not with books that are temporal but with books that are eternal. In the Old Testament we have the beautiful promise of Malachi 3:16: “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name.”

The final mention of “book” in the Bible, on the other hand, is a sober warning not to tamper with the Book. “If any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:19). Let us honor it, guard it, believe it, and follow it. HMM

Tuesday, January 12

A Mighty Man

“And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him, and said unto him, The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valor.”
(Judges 6:12)

Gideon was not a very promising leader to all outward appearances. He was of the undistinguished and divided tribe of Manasseh, and “my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (v. 15).

But that’s exactly the kind of man God knows He can use, for “God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:27). God, therefore, greeted him thus: “The LORD is with thee, thou mighty man of valor” (text verse).

As a matter of fact, there were other qualities in Gideon that must have commended him to God. He was already busy threshing “wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites” (v. 11). He was not sitting idly but was already doing what he could for his people. Furthermore, even though he lived in a time of great apostasy when even his own father kept an altar for the god Baal, he still worshipped the true God and was greatly exercised that “the LORD hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (v. 13). He was burdened for his people, but all he had been able to do was to try to feed them, hiding his wheat from the invaders. Before the Lord could use him further, however, he had to destroy the family idol and offer his own sacrifice to the true God, even though he knew his family and neighbors might try to kill him (vv. 25-32). God, then, did indeed “save Israel from the hand of the Midianites” through Gideon (v. 14).

If we would be mighty for God, like Gideon, we must begin like him: poor yet faithful, burdened for the Lord’s truth, and doing what we can—putting away every idol of the mind, and acknowledging our Savior’s sacrifice for us. HMM

Wednesday, January 13

The Righteous Word

“Righteous art thou, O LORD, and upright are thy judgments. Thy testimonies that thou hast commanded are righteous and very faithful.” (Psalm 119:137-138)

The writer of the book of Hebrews called God’s Word “the word of righteousness” (Hebrews 5:13). Nehemiah declared that God had “performed thy words; for thou art righteous” (Nehemiah 9:8). Those two concepts merge in the beauty of the Word. “For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth” (Psalm 33:4). The written Word is righteous; the cause of the Word is righteous. That theme pervades this stanza of Psalm 119. Several synonyms describe this characteristic of the Scriptures.

- The Lord is righteous, and therefore His judgments are upright. “Good and upright is the LORD: therefore will he teach sinners in the way” (Psalm 25:8).
- God’s Word is very pure (Psalm 119:140), like refined gold. “The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6).
- Because the righteous acts of the Lord have everlasting consequences, the “law is the truth” (Psalm 119:142)—“the righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting” (v. 144).

Since the psalmist dedicated his heart and life to the clarity of God’s Word, righteous jealousy consumed him on behalf of God because the enemies of the Lord forgot His Word (v. 139). Furthermore, even though he felt “small and despised” (v. 141) and trouble and anguish surrounded him, he still delighted in understanding God’s righteous commandments (v. 143).

May the Lord God strengthen our resolve this day to be “doers of the word, and not hearers only” (James 1:22). HMM III

Full

“Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.” (Genesis 25:8)

With the words of our text, Abraham ended a life of faith having walked in such close fellowship with God that “he was called the Friend of God” (James 2:23). But when he died at 175 years old, his standing in the world from a human perspective might not seem to have warranted his nomadic life of sacrifice and faith. He had sojourned in the land given to him by covenant, but he had not taken possession of it in any real sense. Although he had gained a measure of worldly possessions (Genesis 13:2), he had evidently given up a stable and satisfying life of luxury among his people to follow God into the land of promise. Once there, his nephew, Lot, had deserted him, taking the fertile land as his own (13:10-11). Abraham had seen war (chapter 14), famine (12:10), compromise (12:13; 20:2), fighting between his two wives, and had not had children until his old age (chapters 16 and 21), had lived in poor relationship with his neighbors (chapter 20), and had eventually lost his dear wife, Sarah (23:2).

But when Abraham died, Scripture says he died completely satisfied, the literal meaning of the word “full” in our text (the words “of years” added by the translators). He had learned to measure time by eternity, to weigh the value of earthly things by the Spirit. “For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). He had “believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Romans 4:3).

The fullness of Abraham was that of a wealth that death could not touch. The seeming fullness of those who walk by sight, and not by faith, is emptied in death. Men and women of faith carry their fullness with them. When the time comes, may we all die as Abraham died—full. JDM

Friday, January 15

Whosoever Will

“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)

One could not imagine a more clearcut invitation to receive God’s free gift of eternal life than this final climactic invitation of the Bible. Anyone who is thirsting for the water of life may come and drink freely, for Jesus said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37). Whosoever will may come! “There is no respect of persons with God” (Romans 2:11, plus about seven other references), and the Scriptures abound with “whosoever” assurances.

“Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:26). “Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). “Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God” (1 John 4:15).

“Jesus Christ the righteous...is the propitiation...for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2). Therefore, “by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life” (Romans 5:18).

Such promises as these (and many more in the Word of God) make it very clear that the substitutionary death of Christ is sufficient to “[take] away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), that salvation and eternal life are offered as a free gift of God’s grace to anyone who will accept it, and that anyone who will may come! It is only the voluntary act of our own wills that is required, but there are many of whom Jesus must say: “Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:40). HMM

Saturday, January 16

Father of Believers

“And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.” (Genesis 15:6)

The key New Testament doctrine of imputed righteousness, received through saving faith in the Word of God, is foreshadowed beautifully in the life of Abraham. Because of his strong faith, demonstrated again and again in difficult acts of obedience, Abraham has been called “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11). Our text verse is quoted four times in the New Testament (Romans 4:3, 22; Galatians 3:6; James 2:23) and is made the basis of the great gospel theme of salvation and righteousness. This is obtained not by one’s good works but by imputation, and is received through faith in the gracious promises of God through Jesus Christ. “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 5:21).

“Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure...to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all” (Romans 4:16). Just as “Jerusalem which is above...is the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26), so faithful Abraham is “the father of us all.” Spiritual Jerusalem speaks of salvation by grace rather than by law, and Abraham testifies of righteousness through faith rather than by works. And yet, 12 of the 40 verses of Hebrews 11, the great “faith chapter,” deal with the outward evidences of Abraham’s inner faith.

There is still another reference to Abraham’s spiritual seed: “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham” (Galatians 3:7). As Abraham’s spiritual children, therefore, we also ought to believe God’s Word at whatever cost, demonstrating the reality of our faith to the world—as did father Abraham—by obeying God. HMM

Sunday, January 17

Divine Logistics

“And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let no man prevail against thee.”
(2 Chronicles 14:11)

Asa was one of the better kings of Judah (great-grandson of Solomon), and his prayer is a beautiful model of how a servant of God can pray when all the human odds are against him. Asa’s army consisted of 580,000 foot soldiers, whereas the invading Ethiopians had a million-man army with 300 chariots. Yet “the LORD smote the Ethiopians before Asa” (2 Chronicles 14:8-9, 12), and his prayer prevailed.

The Bible has many such examples: Abraham (Genesis 14:1-16); Gideon (Judges 7:7; 8:10); King Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:14, 19, 35). Before King Saul gained a great victory over the hordes of the Philistines, it was the courageous testimony of Jonathan, his son, that led the way. “It may be that the LORD will work for us,” he had said, “for there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14:6). Later, David won many battles against all odds, including his personal victory over Goliath (1 Samuel 17:40-49). The servants of the Lord do not need a majority to prevail in the battle against sin and Satan, for “if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31). That is the key, of course. We must not beseech the Lord to fight on our side. He will be for us if we are first on His side!

This was the message of the prophet Azariah to the godly King Asa: “The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you” (2 Chronicles 15:2). Political power, military might, financial resources—all are futile. “Our help is in the name of the LORD” (Psalm 124:8). HMM

A Better and an Enduring Substance

“For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” (Hebrews 10:36)

Christians have certain heavenly possessions, and this knowledge helps put our earthly possessions and welfare in proper perspective. Evidently, some to whom this was written had been imprisoned, and others impoverished for their faith. “For ye...took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance” (v. 34). Peter called it “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4).

These possessions are *attainable*; they are not in question; they are ours, given to us by the One whose name is “Truth” (John 14:6) and whose Word is trustworthy. We “know” (Hebrews 10:34) this beyond all doubt.

Furthermore, these possessions are *valuable*. We must “cast not away therefore [our] confidence, which hath great recompense of reward” (v. 35). With this assurance, we are able to bear up under any suffering or persecution that comes our way (see also Romans 8:18).

Knowledge of these possessions is *prescriptive*, for it helps us cope with longstanding troubles. In our text, we “have need of patience” to get through them and do “the will of God.” “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (James 5:7-8).

Lastly, realization of these possessions is *imminent*. “For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry” (Hebrews 10:37). “He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). JDM

Tuesday, January 19

The Blindness of Israel

“What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.” (Romans 11:7)

One of the saddest aspects of our world is the blindness of Israel. Even the Orthodox Jews, who strongly affirm their belief in the Old Testament Scriptures, seem unable to see what the Scriptures clearly show, that their Messiah has come and gone. In the first book of the Torah, we read: “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be” (Genesis 49:10). Ancient Jewish commentators agreed that Shiloh was another name for Messiah, but this very fact should prove to modern Jewish expositors that Messiah has already come, for the scepter (the symbol of national leadership) did depart from Judah, very soon after Jesus was crucified.

King David was the first descendant of Judah to attain the scepter of leadership among the tribes of Israel, and the divine promises were clear that Messiah would be in David’s lineage. That Jesus’ legal father, Joseph, and human mother, Mary, were both in that lineage was shown in the genealogies of Matthew 1:1-17 and Luke 3:23-38, respectively, both of which were written when the genealogical records in the Temple were still intact. No one at that time ever questioned their validity, in spite of intense opposition by the Jews to the claims of Jesus and His disciples that He was the Messiah. In 70 AD, the records and the Temple were destroyed so that no later claimant to the title could ever prove his right to the throne. Messiah had come, and was slain, so the scepter departed from Judah until He comes again. It is certain that Jesus was, indeed, the Jews’ promised Messiah, and we should pray that God will soon open their eyes to see and believe. HMM

Wednesday, January 20

Prayer for the Word

“I cried with my whole heart; hear me, O LORD: I will keep thy statutes. I cried unto thee; save me, and I shall keep thy testimonies.” (Psalm 119:145-146)

One of the great privileges we have is the ability to speak directly to our heavenly Father, the Creator of the universe! However, our prayers are often “amiss” (James 4:3) and lack faith (James 1:6).

Not so with this psalmist! He prayed with his whole heart, begging that he “might be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Colossians 1:9). His petition shows a deep spiritual connection to God “with a true heart in full assurance of faith” (Hebrews 10:22).

Note that although the prayer of need recorded in this stanza (Psalm 119:145-152) mentions those who “follow after mischief” (v. 150), most of his conversation with the Father verifies his love for and his hope in God’s Word (v. 147).

This prayer was not routine. “I prevented the dawning of the morning,” the psalmist wrote, and his “eyes prevent the night watches” (vv. 147-148). The matters that drove him to his knees to seek God’s face had kept him awake all night!

Songwriter Mosie Lister wrote “How Long Has It Been?” based on this stanza of Psalm 119:

*How long has it been since you talked with the Lord
And told him your heart’s hidden secrets?
How long since you prayed, how long since you stayed
On your knees till the light shone through?*

Fortunately, Jeremiah recorded this promise from our Lord: “Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13). HMM III

Thursday, January 21

The Prayer of Moses

“O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” (Psalm 90:14)

This majestic yet reflective psalm is the oldest of all psalms. The superscript of the psalm identifies it as “a prayer of Moses, the man of God.” While we are not directly told to do so, it is helpful to consider this psalm as the dying song of this man of God as he reflected back on his long life, including the 40 years in Egypt, the 40 years in Midian, and most importantly the recent 40 years of wilderness wanderings. As we survey this psalm, think of Moses pondering his life’s work shortly before he died.

The first stanza of the psalm (vv. 1-2) contrasts the unchanging eternity of the Lord, “even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God” (v. 2), with the perpetual changes of the recent wilderness wandering in which the people had no “dwelling place” (v. 1). The next stanza (vv. 3-6) notes the frailty of man and the death of a whole generation. But God is the ever-living One; His years do not fail (v. 4). God is also a holy God, justly exercising righteous wrath. The open iniquities and secret sins of all mankind, particularly the people of God, merit His judgment (vv. 7-8).

In verses 9-12 we see the transient, carnal experiences of man contrasted with the permanent, spiritual nature of God. We need to recognize the intensity of His anger (v. 11) and govern our lives accordingly. “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (v. 12).

Perhaps the climax of this psalm is reflected in verses 13-15, where we see the beauty of the Lord our God described as the crowning adornment of human character. The only assurance of the permanent establishment of the work of a man is in its identity with the work of God. Our request of God should be: “Establish thou the work of our hands upon us” (v. 17). JDM

Friday, January 22

The Lord Is Thy Keeper

“The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand....The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.”
(Psalm 121:5, 8)

One of the most precious doctrines in all of Scripture is that of the secure position of the believer in Christ Jesus. Nothing in creation is “able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

The apostle Peter tells us that we who are born again are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation” (1 Peter 1:5). Nothing we can do can merit salvation; similarly, nothing we do can keep it. This is God’s work, not ours, and extends to all realms of our lives. “I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved [usually translated ‘kept’] blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

This keeping aspect of God’s work for us should not be a surprise, for Christ prayed for just this. With His betrayal, trial, crucifixion, and death imminent, He prayed for all who would eventually believe on Him (John 17:20). “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me....While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost....I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil [one]” (John 17:11-12, 15). We can be certain the prayer is answered, for God the Father would surely hear the intercessory prayer of His own beloved Son.

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 1:24-25). JDM

Saturday, January 23

Thy Light and Thy Truth

*“O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles.”
(Psalm 43:3)*

This old troubled world desperately needs light to find the way out of its darkness and truth to rightly plan its future. But they must be God’s light and God’s truth, not the seductive lights and humanistic philosophies of man’s fabrications.

God has, indeed, already sent out His light and His truth, but “men loved darkness rather than light” (John 3:19) and, although they profess to be “ever learning,” they yet are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” and, in fact, “turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7; 4:4).

That was true in the psalmist’s day, and perhaps even more so in our day, although we surely have far more light and access to truth today than the psalmist ever had. We now have, for example, God’s complete written Word (Genesis through Revelation). Another psalmist had promised: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psalm 119:105), and also had promised: “For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light” (Proverbs 6:23).

God’s truth surely is what we *need*—in fact, all we need—for our faith as we look to our future. This also is revealed in the light of His Word, both His inspired written Word and His incarnate living Word. The Lord Jesus not only claimed “I am...the truth” (John 14:6), He also prayed for us, saying: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). And for all who believe His revealed truth: “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). HMM

Jots and Tittles

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

Concerning Scripture, Christ taught that every “jot and tittle” (i.e., even portions of letters, not to mention words and phrases) was inspired and would last forever. In many portions of Scripture, the teaching rests on a seemingly rather insignificant component of a word or phrase.

For example, consider the phrase “yet once more” in Hebrews 12:26, quoting Haggai 2:6. We see in verse 27 that the argument requiring a coming judgment on all of creation hinges on it pointing back to a similar judgment in the past. Similarly, in Galatians 4:9, we see Paul couching his comments to the Galatian believers, who had returned to a legalistic system, in a question that turned on the active voice of a verb rather than passive. We have not only “known God” but “are known of God.” In John 8:58, a clever use of verb tense was made: “Before Abraham was, I am,” thereby asserting Christ’s deity. Note also in John 10:34-36 how Christ cleverly used the mood of a verb while quoting from Psalm 82:6 in order to defuse the charge of blasphemy leveled against Him. Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:16 (based on a quotation from Genesis 22:17-18) shows how even the singular or plural form of a word is equally inspired.

Consider Christ’s answer to the Sadducees, who denied personal resurrection, when He said, “Have ye not read...I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matthew 22:31-32). Christ is their God, not simply was. “And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine” (v. 33).

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable.” Let us handle Scripture with the same care and love it with the same fervency as did Christ and the apostles. JDM

Monday, January 25

Teachers and Soldiers

“And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.” (2 Timothy 2:26)

We are in a great battle for the minds of young people today. The battlefield may be the classroom, or the home, or the church, or the family television, or any place else where teaching—good or bad—takes place.

It is significant that one of the greatest verses on teaching and one of the greatest on soldiering occur together. “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. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Timothy 2:2-3). Thus, it seems clear that a faithful teacher is a good soldier in the battle of Jesus Christ against the devil for the minds of those we are trying to teach.

The battle is not to be fought with bullets, however, or even with ballots, but with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). Furthermore, our battlefield strategy is not to strike down our enemy with a sharpened tongue or to bludgeon him with a superior intellect. “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6). Our text for the day gives us reason to continue, for it promises that those whose minds have been ensnared by the devil may yet be recovered. The words just preceding this verse describe our tactics: “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24-25). Not even Satan can stand before the mighty sword of the Spirit, wielded by an apt soldier-teacher. HMM

Tuesday, January 26

The Elect of God

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.” (Romans 8:33)

The doctrine of election is a key doctrine of Scripture, but it is also controversial, so any discussion of it should, mostly, let the Scriptures speak for themselves. The Greek and Hebrew words for the “elect” are the same as for the “chosen,” and it is clear that whenever the elect are mentioned, it is God, not man, who has done the choosing.

For example, Christ elected the 12 to be His apostles of His own volition. They are called, in fact, “the apostles whom he had chosen” (Acts 1:2). The Scriptures also speak of “the elect angels” (1 Timothy 5:21) and even of Christ Himself as being the “chief cornerstone, elect, precious” (1 Peter 2:6).

Most often, however, the term is applied to those who have been saved through faith in Christ and His substitutionary death, and they are said to have been “chosen...in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). Having been chosen, these elect ones are then, in the fullness of time, drawn to Christ. As He said: “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him”; and He also said: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:44, 37). Finally, to make it crystal clear who does the choosing, Jesus said: “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit” (John 15:16).

None of this eliminates our individual responsibility to “make [our] calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10), but the grand purpose of this great doctrine is simply this: “Base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen....That no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Corinthians 1:28-29). HMM

Wednesday, January 27

Delivered by the Word

“Consider mine affliction, and deliver me: for I do not forget thy law. Plead my cause, and deliver me: quicken me according to thy word.” (Psalm 119:153-154)

Much of the Old Testament records God’s intervention into the affairs of men, often in huge victories on the battlefield. The great military king David wrote frequently of his deliverance amid slaughter, and certainly there is an overtone of physical deliverance felt in these verses.

The key to this prayer, however, is in verse 158: “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word.” Although the psalmist spoke of his many “persecutors and...enemies” (v. 157), his desire was fixed directly on the faithfulness of God’s promises. Note the constant reliance on the truth of what God has said:

- “I do not forget thy law” (v. 153). God spoke of the opposite condition through Hosea: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).
- “Quicken me according to thy word” (v. 154), for the “wicked...seek not thy statutes” (v. 155).
- Even though there are many enemies who persecuted him “without cause” (Psalm 35:7), this godly man would not “decline from thy testimonies” (Psalm 119:157).
- “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word” (v. 158). Jesus felt the same righteous emotion when He “looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts” (Mark 3:5).

Hearts not stirred with the Holy Spirit’s indignation at the wicked culture and flagrant violators of God’s Word should “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). Those who love God’s holiness also love God’s Word. HMM III

Thursday, January 28

Thou Hast Made Me Glad

“For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.” (Psalm 92:4)

“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O Most High” (Psalm 92:1). So begins this “Song for the Sabbath day” (heading), the psalmist extolling the virtues of praising God both day and night (v. 2). The true believer, with a proper understanding of God’s majesty, can see, in every situation, His lovingkindness and faithfulness. There is no better way to begin and end the day than to rehearse manifestations of His loving control over each event and circumstance and express confidence in His ability to handle new situations. “O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep” (v. 5).

Vexation over the seeming prosperity of the enemies of God is understandable, but we must rest in the fact that God will act justly at the proper time, when it best suits His purpose. “The wicked...shall be destroyed for ever: But thou, LORD, art most high for evermore. For, lo, thine enemies, O LORD,...shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered” (vv. 7-9).

Conversely, the righteous will ultimately flourish. Whether in this lifetime or in the next, God’s justice will prevail. “Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God” (v. 13).

The claim of ultimate victory must not be considered as vague, insufficient, and improbable, as skeptics have always claimed. The reputation of God Himself is on the line. He will not allow His name to be tarnished. He must act “to shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him” (v. 15). As in our text, we can even now be “glad” and “triumph” in His works, whether we see them in this life or in the life to come. “O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep” (v. 5). JDM

Friday, January 29

Children in Heaven

“And [David] said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live? But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.” (2 Samuel 12:22-23)

The death of a loved one is always a time of great sorrow, but the death of a beloved child is perhaps the keenest sorrow of all. Nevertheless, for the Christian believer, we “sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

Our text verse makes it clear that when a child dies (even one born of a sinful relationship such as this child of David and Bathsheba), that child goes to be with the Lord in heaven. Jesus said: “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 19:14).

Heaven is thus a place where there are many “little children.” Their inherited sin-nature never yet had generated acts of willful sin, and their Maker is Himself “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), so they are safe in Him. Although there are few specific Scriptures on this subject, what we do know, both from the love of God and the Word of God, suggests that the souls of all deceased little children are with the Lord in heaven, but also those who died in early childhood (and even before birth) from every time and place since the world began. There they, along with all those who were saved by personal faith in Christ and are now awaiting the resurrection, will receive new bodies when Christ returns to Earth. The old and lame will be young and strong again, and the children will grow to perfect maturity, for all will become “like him” (1 John 3:2). “God shall wipe away all tears” (Revelation 21:4), and all will say: “As for God, his way is perfect” (Psalm 18:30). HMM

Saturday, January 30

Treasure in Heaven

“Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth.” (Luke 12:33)

The Lord Jesus frequently warned us against trying to accumulate wealth here on Earth. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,” He said. Rather, “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19-20). In our text above, He even says to sell what we have and give it away. To the rich young ruler, He said: “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven” (Matthew 19:21).

God’s Word cannot contradict itself, however, so this teaching must also be balanced against a man’s responsibility to “provide... for his own, and specially for those of his own house” (1 Timothy 5:8). Similarly, “the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (2 Corinthians 12:14).

We are also encouraged to “give to him that needeth” (Ephesians 4:28) and to sow “bountifully” as “a cheerful giver” (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). Such instructions imply that by faithful labor in the vocations God has given us, we shall have the wherewithal to do such things. Ananias and Sapphira were punished not for retaining part of their possessions for their own needs, but rather because they lied about it (Acts 5:1-10). Our giving should be done “with simplicity”—that is, with “singleness” of heart (Romans 12:8).

All we have is of the Lord and should be used in ways that honor Him, in accord with His Word and His providential leading. We should provide judiciously for the needs of those dependent on us, but our own personal needs and wants should be kept minimal so that more can be used in His service and to meet the needs of others. HMM

Sunday, January 31

Outward Appearances

“But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”
(1 Samuel 16:7)

Man does, indeed, look on the outward appearance rather than inward convictions. This has always been true, but never more so than in these latter days, even among evangelical Christians.

There is very little emphasis in the Bible on such things, however. As far as dress and adornment are concerned, Paul said: “I will therefore that...women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works” (1 Timothy 2:8-10). The same principle surely would apply also to men.

With respect to physical conditioning and development, the following is almost the only reference in the Bible: “Bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things” (1 Timothy 4:8). The apostle Paul himself (probably the most effective and fruitful Christian of all) was a man of most unimpressive appearance (2 Corinthians 10:10). “I was with you in weakness,” he reminded them, but nevertheless it was “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Corinthians 2:3-4).

There is nothing wrong, of course, with physical beauty or athletic prowess, unless they center attention on self rather than Christ, but it is the “inner man” of the heart where true strength and beauty should be sought. Therefore, as Jesus said: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). The Lord looks on the heart, and so should we. HMM

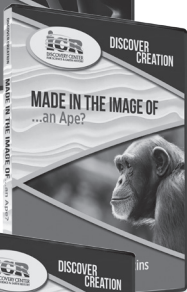
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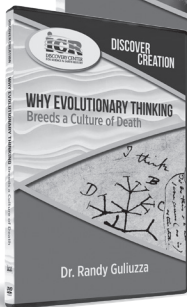
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Monday, February 1

The Wonderful Angel

“And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?” (Judges 13:18)

This intriguing encounter occurred during one of Israel’s periods of apostasy and servitude, when the people had been ruled for 40 years by the pagan Philistines. There was one godly couple in the tribe of Dan, however, who evidently had long been praying for a son, and God finally answered their prayers. “The angel of the LORD” came to give the good news to Manoah and his wife. The remarkable son who was to come was mighty Samson, who later would free his people.

But it is the Angel Himself who is most intriguing here. His name was “Secret,” meaning “too marvelous even to comprehend.” The same word is translated “Wonderful” in Isaiah 9:6, where it is cited as a name of the coming divine Son, whose name would also be “mighty God” and “everlasting Father.”

This “angel of the LORD” was thus none other than God the Son in one of His rare pre-incarnate appearances, or theophanies, when the invisible God manifested Himself visibly to man. There are many created angels (Hebrews 12:22), or “messengers,” of God, but on certain occasions, this One who is called “the angel of the LORD” (also “the angel of his presence,” as in Isaiah 63:9, and “the Angel which redeemed me,” as in Genesis 48:16), is clearly none other than God Himself. In such cases, it could only have been the pre-incarnate Christ, for the Bible says: “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18).

God had already revealed Himself in this way to great men of God, and now even to an unknown couple. Eventually this Angel, whose name is Wonderful, “was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), and will one day dwell with His people forever (Revelation 21:3). HMM

Tuesday, February 2

Prophets from the Beginning

“That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.” (Luke 11:50-51)

God’s true prophets have been persecuted from the beginning. Abel, son of Adam and Eve, was the first, according to Jesus, for his blood was shed by Cain “from the foundation of the world.” A “prophet” in biblical terms was a man who proclaimed inspired words from God (not necessarily predictions of the future, but words inspired by the Holy Spirit—note 1 Peter 1:10-11; 2 Peter 1:19-21).

Evidently Abel was speaking God’s own words to Cain when the latter slew him in jealous wrath. The Zacharias mentioned is probably “Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest,” who was stoned when he prophesied against the people under King Joash (2 Chronicles 24:20-22), for he was the last prophet actually mentioned in the Old Testament as having been slain for his testimony.

Thus, the period encompassed by the Lord’s statement was the entire Old Testament period, “from the foundation of the world” to the coming of Christ. The same experience awaited most of the prophets used by God to pen the New Testament Scriptures. Thus does the world react to God’s inspired Word!

There is another important truth in this passage. The blood of God’s prophets began to be shed “from the foundation of the world,” not just beginning almost five billion years after the foundation of the world, as modern evolutionists allege! This is striking confirmation that the world was made from start to finish in six literal days. See also Mark 10:6, Acts 3:21, etc., for similar incidental confirmations of this truth. HMM

Wednesday, February 3

The Awesome Word

“Princes have persecuted me without a cause: but my heart standeth in awe of thy word.” (Psalm 119:161)

This stanza of Psalm 119 is rich in descriptions of the way God’s Word envelops the believer in awe and wonder. This initial focus is of the heart rather than the mind. Our minds are key to growth and maturity in Christ (Romans 12:1-2), but the heart *must* be engaged in our relationship with our heavenly Father (Luke 10:27).

The psalmist rejoiced in the Word of God “as one that findeth great spoil” (Psalm 119:162). Peter taught that the Word “liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23). It is far more than written text; it is the very God-breathed words by which the Lord Jesus will ultimately judge the world (John 12:48).

Love for the Word of God can cause the godly to “hate and abhor lying” (Psalm 119:163) and begin to recognize the way that God exercises His “righteous judgments” (v. 164) on those who dare to flaunt their wickedness. Nothing, the psalmist noted, “shall offend them” (v. 165). That mature perception brings praise “seven times a day” (v. 164). It also brings “great peace” (v. 165), the “peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

Reveling in the wonder and awe of the Scriptures brings a stable “[hope] for [our] salvation” (Psalm 119:166), which in turn produces an open obedience to the commandments of God and a “soul” commitment to guard the Word (v. 167). This godly lifestyle is assured by those who understand that “all [our] ways are before thee” (v. 168). “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). HMM III

Thursday, February 4

Prophecy

“I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.”
(Deuteronomy 18:18)

Two types of prophecy must be distinguished. When a prophet foretells or predicts, he represents the future in light of the present. But frequently the prophetic message consisted of rebuking, reproof, counseling, or admonishing, i.e., forth-telling rather than foretelling. As such, he portrays the present in light of the future.

It is the predictive type of prophecy that provides such a strong argument for rational faith. Neither human intuition about the future nor limited Satanic control of the future can account for the hundreds of specific biblical prophecies that have been literally and specifically fulfilled. These could only come by divine revelation from the One who both knows and controls the future.

Actually, predictive prophecy provides a double defense: Not only does it prove the divine origin, inspiration, and authority of Scripture, but since over half of the prophecies converge on the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, it advocates His deity and Messiahship. One could hardly read Isaiah 52:13–53:12 or Psalm 22 without recognizing that these are prophetic portraits of Christ on the cross. Others, equally specific, deal with other aspects of His life and ministry.

Still others predict the coming Kingdom to be set up by Christ, in which we as believers will have a part. Having seen so many prophecies literally fulfilled, we can have complete confidence that these others will come to pass as well. “We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:2-3). JDM

Friday, February 5

The Worldwide Flood

“And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.” (Genesis 9:11)

Those Christians who accept the concept of the “geological ages” commonly have to explain away the great deluge by assuming it was not really a global flood. They realize that any flood that would rise until “all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered” and in which “every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground” (Genesis 7:19, 23) would undoubtedly eliminate any evidence of the supposed geological ages. Therefore, they have suggested modifying the Bible record to mean an overflow of the Euphrates River or some such phenomenon that would destroy just the peoples of the “known” world at that time.

There are numerous problems with this “local flood” notion, however. Appendix 6 of *The Henry Morris Study Bible*, for instance, lists 100 reasons why the biblical Flood must be understood as worldwide and cataclysmic.

But probably the best argument is that such an argument makes God out to be a liar! God promised Noah that this kind of flood would never be sent on the earth again. There have been innumerable river floods, tsunamis, torrential regional rains, etc., in the more than four millennia since Noah’s day. If God’s promise referred only to some such flood as one of these, then He has not kept His Word!

But God does not lie, and He has kept His promise. There has never been another such Flood. “He that believeth not God hath made him a liar” (1 John 5:10). Theistic evolutionists, progressive creationists, and all others who believe the geological ages instead of God’s Word should, it would seem, seriously rethink their position. HMM

Saturday, February 6

Neither Wine nor Strong Drink

“For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb.” (Luke 1:15)

Whether or not the Bible clearly commands total abstinence from alcohol for Christians, it is increasingly being recognized that alcohol is the most widely abused and dangerous drug of all—causing more fatal accidents and injuries, more broken homes, more sexual promiscuity, more job absenteeism, and more disease than cocaine or any other drug. Yet it is widely promoted socially and increasingly is being accepted even among evangelical Christians.

But the example of John the Baptist is worth considering. The angel Gabriel testified that he would be “great in the sight of the Lord” and then added that he would “drink neither wine nor strong drink,” implying a connection between the two. Indeed, Christ called John the greatest man who had ever lived up to that time (Matthew 11:11)—that is, greater than even Abraham, Moses, or Daniel!

Then the very same verse says that John would “be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb,” and he is the only man of whom that was ever said. Again there seems to be a connection, for no one could simultaneously drink wine or strong drink and also be filled with the Spirit. The apostle Paul also warned concerning this conflict when he said: “Be not drunk [literally, ‘begin to be drunk’] with wine...but be filled [that is, ‘be continually being filled’] with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18).

Drinking alcoholic beverages in moderation may or may not be permissible, but that does not make it right. “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient” (1 Corinthians 6:12). At least in John’s case, being great in God’s sight and being filled with the Spirit were closely associated with abstinence from alcohol. HMM

Sunday, February 7

Labor—The Gift of God

“And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.” (Ecclesiastes 3:13)

Some people may have the feeling that having to work for a living is an imposition of a corrupt society. Since they were brought into this world through no choice of their own, therefore the world owes them a living, they think. Is working a punishment because of our sins?

Well, God did “curse” the ground because of sin, but in an important sense it was for man’s own good. “Cursed is the ground,” He told Adam, “for thy sake” (Genesis 3:17). It would require “the sweat of thy face” (v. 19) before man could eat his bread, and even then it would be “in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life” (v. 17).

But the work itself would not be a punishment, for even before Adam sinned, God had given him the responsibility in the Edenic garden “to dress it and to keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Furthermore, we shall have work to do in the new earth in the ages to come, for we are told that “his servants shall serve him” there (Revelation 22:3), even though there will be no remnant of sinfulness there at all.

Even in this life, work is a blessing when we see it as “the gift of God.” If we see it only as drudgery and hardship, then it can indeed be “in sorrow.” But the Lord Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

If having to work for a living will encourage us to come to Christ for salvation and peace of soul, then it is truly “for thy sake” that God’s curse was pronounced on the ground. The key to joy in labor, instead of sorrow, is noted by the apostle Paul. “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men....for ye serve the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24). HMM

Monday, February 8

A Model Church

“Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

Paul had begun the work at Thessalonica, and when forced to leave, he maintained an active interest in and contact with the Thessalonian believers. The book of 1 Thessalonians contains both encouragement and commendation for these believers. In the context of our text verse, he mentions some of their strengths, and it would behoove us to take note and apply these strengths to our churches.

Paul mentions the triad of faith, love, and hope so common in New Testament writings. The “work of faith,” that past work of salvation in the believer’s life, is amplified in verses 4-6, where we see that God has chosen to work His work of grace in them through the Word of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (v. 5). Their reception of the Word had been with both affliction and joy (v. 6).

Next, Paul commends their “labour of love.” They were committed to both outreach and missions, as we see in verses 7 and 8. Their testimony had not only affected the local area but was “spread abroad.” Moreover, they had entered into proper worship of God, maintaining purity of doctrine (v. 9). The “labour of love” to others will inevitably follow as a means of serving God.

Lastly, Paul commends their “patience of hope”—their expectant joyful outlook on the future, waiting for Christ’s return (v. 10).

May our own churches have this same perspective on the past, present, and future work of Christ. May our own lives give attention to the same details and have the same goals and outlook as those of the Thessalonian church. Purity in doctrine and a life of service constitute the best way to wait for our Lord’s return. JDM

Tuesday, February 9

Selah

“Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. Selah.” (Psalm 3:2)

The word *Selah* occurs 74 times in the Bible (three of which are in the prophetic psalm of Habakkuk, with the other 71 in the book of Psalms). The first of these occurrences is here in Psalm 3:2, and it also occurs at the end of verses 4 and 8, thus in effect dividing Psalm 3 into three “stanzas.”

However, its exact meaning is uncertain. Most authorities think it is some kind of musical notation, to be applied when the psalm was being sung with accompanying musical instrumentation. It suggests a pause of some kind, perhaps to allow the instruments to play a few notes while the singers were silent before proceeding with the next portion, possibly changing to a different key.

When the psalm is merely being read, however, as must often be the case, this explanation would be pointless. Thus, some think it indicates a brief pause for reflection on the truth just revealed before proceeding to the next point. *Selah* might, therefore, mean something like “Think of that!”

In Psalm 3, as the first instance, verse 2 notes that many (perhaps originally those involved in Absalom’s rebellion against King David) are saying: “Not even God can help him now!” But then the psalmist remembers God’s promises and he prays, and God answers, so now he can say: “Well, what do you think about that?” Both exclamations are implied by his *Selah*.

Then in the third stanza, he stresses his security in his Lord. He can sleep and “not be afraid of ten thousands of people, that have set themselves against me round about...Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people” (Psalm 3:6, 8). “So, what can you say about that, you enemies of God and His Word?” (*Selah*.) HMM

Wednesday, February 10

According to the Word

“Let my cry come near before thee, O LORD: give me understanding according to thy word.” (Psalm 119:169)

The closing 22nd stanza of Psalm 119 repeats many of the themes of the previous 21 and summarizes this epic to the majesty of the Word of God.

Seven passages contain prayer for “understanding,” which depends on the gracious ministry of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds (John 14:26). Our finite minds cannot understand God’s eternal truths apart from revelation and the “mind of Christ” granted at salvation (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Thirteen passages use “according to thy word.” Nothing that we can do pleases God more than our efforts to “magnify” His Word in our lives and ministries (Psalm 138:2). Every sentient creature will be judged by what is “written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12).

Eight stanzas include the prayer to have God “teach.” Again, apart from the Holy Spirit in our “new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17), we would be empty of both understanding and wisdom. Through reading and meditating on God’s Word after salvation, we grow effective and gain maturity.

The writer also promised in eight stanzas to “not forget.” Our minds need to become stabilized with memorized Scripture and our hearts ready and sanctified with the stored Word of God so that we can “give an answer” both to those who ask us (1 Peter 3:15) and when we need guidance for our own life decisions (Colossians 1:10).

The psalm ends with a prayer for all: “Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts. I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight. Let my soul live, and it shall praise thee; and let thy judgments help me. I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments” (Psalm 119:173-176). HMM III

Thursday, February 11

The Living and the Written Word

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

The Holy Scriptures and the person of our Lord Jesus Christ are so inseparably bound together that whatever calls into question the integrity and authority of one correspondingly casts aspersions on the other. Let us not be guilty of saying that the written Word and the incarnate Word are in all aspects the same, but the Bible does clearly reveal Christ as “the Word... made flesh, [who] dwelt among us” (John 1:14). “And his name is called The Word of God” (Revelation 19:13).

In carefully worded arguments, Christ time and again called attention to the fact that the teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures were actually teaching about Him. “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me....For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?” (John 5:39, 46-47). “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead” (Luke 16:31).

Therefore, those who diligently search the Scriptures find in them sufficient testimony to Christ, and where there is faith in the witness of Scripture, there will be faith in Christ and His words. But if men reject the testimony of Scripture, they will not even be convinced by His miraculous resurrection from the dead.

Christ claimed that all of Scripture pointed to Him. On the road to Emmaus, He taught that all three popular divisions of the Old Testament traced one progressive Messianic revelation. To understand the New Testament, we must know the Old, for both tell the same story, each amplifying the other. They are forever inseparable. JDM

Friday, February 12

Our Ministry to Angels

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.” (Ephesians 3:10)

There is “an innumerable company of angels” in heaven (Hebrews 12:22) who serve as “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14).

At the same time, it is instructive to realize we also have a ministry to the angels. Despite their great power and knowledge, angels are not the “heirs of salvation” themselves and so will never personally experience that peculiar type of love and fellowship that we share with our Lord and Savior. Nevertheless, as personal beings with the free will to reject their role as God’s servants if they choose, they are intensely interested in our salvation. “Which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12).

In addition to serving for the protection and guidance of individual believers, apparently certain angels are also assigned by God to serve Christian congregations functioning corporately, especially in true local churches. Paul mentions the observing presence of angels in the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 11:10), for example.

In His letters to the seven representative churches, Christ addressed the individual angels of each church (Revelation 2:1, etc.). That these are heavenly angels (not human pastors or other human church leaders) seems probable from the fact that the word “angel” is used 65 other times in Revelation and always refers to real angels.

Finally, the words of our text for the day give a special incentive for our lives, for there we are reminded that it is through God’s dealings with “the church” that His holy angels are able to learn for themselves “the manifold wisdom of God.” HMM

Saturday, February 13

Confirmation of the Gospel

“Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.” (Philippians 1:7)

The gospel, of course, embraces all the truths concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ, from creation to consummation. Since these truths have been under Satanic attack throughout all the ages, it is vital that the gospel both be defended against its enemies and confirmed in the hearts and minds of its friends.

The word for “defense” (Greek *apologia*) is the same as “answer” in 1 Peter 3:15, where we are commanded to “be ready always to give an answer...a reason of the hope that is in you.” The word for “confirmation,” on the other hand, is essentially the same as “established,” or “stabilized,” as in Colossians 2:7: “Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith.” Thus, the saving gospel of Christ—from its foundation in genuine creationism to its consummation in His coming kingdom with its central focus on the crucifixion and resurrection—is both to be defended against false teaching and established as truth. These two aspects correspond in general to apologetics in defending the faith and Christian evidences in establishing the faith.

This is not merely a job for certain theological or scientific specialists, however. All believers need to be “partakers” of this grace (literally “convinced co-participants”). Real “partakers” do not just go along for the ride but are firmly committed and fully comprehending supporters. However, both those who lead out in such a work, as well as those who are “partakers,” are exhorted to do so in grace! “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6). HMM

Sunday, February 14

The Greatest Love

“And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” (Genesis 22:2)

There are many types of love in the world—romantic love, marital love, erotic love, brotherly love, maternal love, patriotic love, family love, and love for all kinds of things—pets, food, money, sports, and on and on. But what is the greatest love?

Love is probably the greatest word of the Bible, and, by the principle of first mention of important biblical words, the first time the word “love” occurs should be a key to its use all through the Bible. Rather surprisingly, love is first encountered here in our text, speaking of the love of a father for his son, of Abraham for Isaac, the son of promise. Furthermore, the father is being told by the very God who made the promise to offer his beloved son as a sacrifice!

From the New Testament (see Hebrews 11:17-18), we know that this entire scene is a remarkable type of the heavenly Father and His willingness to offer His own beloved Son in sacrifice for the sin of the world. This tells us that the love of this human father for his human son is an earthly picture of the great eternal love of the Father in heaven for His only begotten Son.

And that means that this love of God the Father for God the Son is the ultimate source of all love, for that love was being exercised before the world began. When Jesus prayed to His Father the night before His sacrificial death, He confirmed this great truth; “for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world,” He prayed (John 17:24). Indeed, “God is love” (1 John 4:8), and the eternal love within the triune Godhead is the fountainhead of all true human love here on Earth. HMM

Monday, February 15

The Righteous in Authority

“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” (Proverbs 29:2)

Many can remember when the nation observed holidays on both the birthday of President Lincoln (February 12) and that of President Washington (February 22). These two men were widely revered as our nation’s greatest presidents, and their birthdays were patriotic holidays. But modern intellectuals have been actively tarnishing their reputations, while our people have become more and more enamored of recreation, so this situation has now “devolved” into a three-day holiday theoretically honoring all presidents.

We are thankful, of course, that most of our presidents have indeed been God-fearing men. None were atheists and almost all have professed belief in Christ and the Bible. God surely led our founders when they formed our constitutional republic, and our presidents and most other leaders have diligently supported it. Christianity has thrived in our country as a result, and we have become acknowledged everywhere as the world’s greatest nation.

But signs of deterioration are abounding, and Christians need to pray. If Paul were here today, he would surely repeat (and slightly rephrase) his first-century admonition to young pastor Timothy: “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For [presidents], and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-3). We can also heed Peter’s advice: “Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the [president]” (1 Peter 2:17). HMM

Tuesday, February 16

All Things Well

“And were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well: he maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.” (Mark 7:37)

Jesus indeed “hath done all things well.” One strong evidence of His deity is this very fact. No matter how carefully we study His deeds, we can find no flaw in any of them—no deficiency, nothing He should have done differently or left undone. He never had to apologize or express regrets, as we often at least ought to do. He was always master of every situation. Peter said that He just “went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38).

The same truth would apply—perhaps even more emphatically—to His words. He never had to speculate or equivocate: “And they were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one that had authority, and not as the scribes” (Mark 1:22). Jesus never guessed about anything or merely expressed an opinion, as we frequently do. He never suggested a “possible” interpretation. Everything He taught was with absolute authority, for He was (and is) the very Word of God (John 1:1, 14).

His words occasionally were harsh and judgmental when dealing with hypocrisy and false teaching (e.g., Matthew 23:29-33), but more often were kind and forgiving. In fact, “all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22). Even the soldiers sent to arrest Jesus returned empty-handed, for as they said: “Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46).

Indeed, “his word was with power” (Luke 4:32). He was “Jesus of Nazareth...a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people” (Luke 24:19). In fact, He was more than a man; He was the perfect man and the only-begotten Son of God! HMM

Wednesday, February 17

Created and Made

“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” (Genesis 2:4)

There are two accounts of creation in Genesis, with the above text marking the dividing point. In the first (Genesis 1–2:4), the name used for the Creator is “God” (Hebrew *Elohim*), and its termination is the summarizing “signature,” as it were: “These are the generations [Hebrew *toledoth*] of the heavens and of the earth when they were created.”

The second account (Genesis 2:4–5:1) normally uses the name “LORD God” (*Jehovah Elohim*) in chapters 2 and 3 (except where the serpent and Eve used *Elohim* when she was being tempted) and then simply “LORD” (Hebrew *Jehovah*) in chapter 4. This second creation account ends with Adam’s signature: “This is the book of the generations [i.e., *toledoth*] of Adam.”

Critics claim that the two accounts are contradictory. Actually they are complementary, the second merely giving more details of the events of the fifth and sixth days of the creation week. The Lord Jesus (who was *there* as the Creator!) used them both, quoting from each (Matthew 19:4-6) at the same time in the same context.

Note also that “create” (Hebrew *bara*) is used seven times in Genesis 1, never in Genesis 2–4. In that second account, “made” and “formed” (Hebrew *asah*, *yatsar*) are the words used. Genesis 2:3 stresses the fact that “create” and “make” are different when it tells us that God rested “from all his work which God *created and made*.” Evidently the verb “create,” which always has the Creator as its subject, refers to His work in calling entities into existence; “make” refers to systems constructed (by either God or men) out of previously created entities. The heavens and the earth were both “created” and “made” (see our text). HMM

Thursday, February 18

The Higher Ways

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
(Isaiah 55:9)

God’s thoughts and ways are by no means equivalent to man’s. How, then, can we hope to understand those things that He has communicated to us in His Word? To be sure, God has not told us all He knows, but what He has provided is sufficient for our faith, and He has also given clues as to the nature of many things we can only fully know in eternity. We know enough now to trust Him for the things we can’t verify. But the aspect of Scripture that sets it apart from all other “religious” writings is that its truths are surrounded by and based on historical and scientific facts that are verifiable. The fact that we find Scripture to be accurate wherever it can be checked gives us reason to believe that those teachings that we can’t check are accurate as well.

What are some of God’s favorite object lessons? Certainly His creation is one. A God who can call something into existence that didn’t exist before can do anything. “Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things” (Isaiah 40:26). Another standard is God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt. “According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I shew unto him marvellous things” (Micah 7:15). Yet another is the second regathering of Israel in the last days. “The LORD liveth, that brought up the children of Israel from...all the lands whither he had driven them” (Jeremiah 16:15; cf. v. 14). The final great guarantee that He will work on our behalf is the fact of the resurrection. “His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead” (Ephesians 1:19-20).

Make no mistake! God is capable of solving any problem we have. And what’s more, He wants us to know it! JDM

Friday, February 19

With Christ

“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Colossians 3:2-3)

The apostle Paul, looking forward to the time when we shall “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17), wrote: “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you” (Philippians 1:23-24).

The fact is, however, that we can be “with Christ” even while still abiding in the flesh, as Paul himself emphasized. This is the great principle called positional truth. “Positionally,” we are already “with Christ,” for that is where God sees us and how He relates to us. He has “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

Before we could be raised up with Christ, however, we first had to die with Him. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). God even saw us as buried with Christ when He was buried, and this is the great truth symbolized in our baptism. “We are buried with him by baptism into death” (Romans 6:4).

“Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more” (Romans 6:8-9). He died for us, so our deserved death became His substitutionary death, and His victorious resurrection becomes our own unmerited deliverance from death in eternal resurrection life. This is our position now, and our assured everlasting possession then, for we are with Christ, who “dieth no more.”

This truth is not only a wonderful doctrine, but as we see in our text, a focus for our thoughts, and real incentive for godly living. HMM

Saturday, February 20

Fear of Witnessing

“And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” (Acts 4:18)

Every Christian knows that he or she should witness for Christ, but most are very reluctant to speak in His name very often. The most obvious reason for this hesitancy is fear. Sometimes we may be actually forbidden, as were the apostles, to teach of Him, but their courageous answer was: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29), and so they prayed: “Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word” (Acts 4:29).

More common than fear of physical persecution or personal harm, however, is fear of ridicule, or loss of prestige or position. Such fear is out of character for real Christians, “for God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). If we love the Lord and those for whom He died, we must learn to conquer our fear of men.

One of the saddest rebukes that could come to a Christian is the indictment lodged against those believers who, because of their high position, refused to take an open stand for Christ: “Among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43). How often do modern professional and business men—even theologians—compromise their stand for Christ and His inerrant Word because of fear of peer pressure in what should be their spheres of influence and testimony?

May God give us the courage of Paul. “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ,” he wrote, “for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). HMM

Sunday, February 21

Not This Man

“Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber.” (John 18:40)

Unfortunately, this is the attitude of every generation toward its Creator and Redeemer. Jesus Christ “was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not” (John 1:10-11).

“Not this man!” they cried, and still cry today. “We will not have this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14). Even in a nation founded as a Christian nation, the name of Jesus Christ is banished from the schools, ignored in the halls of government, and blasphemed on the streets.

And whom did they choose instead of “this man”? They preferred Barabbas, who was not only a robber, but also a revolutionary and murderer (Luke 23:19). Today, they idolize the atheist Darwin, or the robber Lenin, or the revolutionary Mao, or the murderer Hitler, or any one of a thousand anti-christs; but they will not have Christ.

What, then, will they do with Christ? “Away with him, away with him, crucify him” (John 19:15) was the cry even of the religious leaders during His life here on Earth, and it is little different today. “Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you,” proclaimed Peter (Acts 3:14). “The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ” (Acts 4:26).

The rejection of Christ today is often more subtle, but it is just as real. Rulers, industrialists, scientists, educators, and commentators all say in deed, if not in word, that “[they] will not have this man to reign over [them]” (Luke 19:14). “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12). HMM

Monday, February 22

Creation in Praise of God

“For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.” (Isaiah 55:12)

Every now and again, the biblical writers were so lifted up in spirit as they contemplated the glory of God and His great works of creation and redemption that they could sense the very creation itself singing out in happy praises. “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1) is one of the most familiar of these divinely inspired figures of speech, but there are many others. “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all the earth:...Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof...Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before the LORD; for he cometh to judge the earth” (Psalm 98:4, 7-9).

Often these praises are in contemplation of God’s final return to complete and fulfill all His primeval purposes in creation, as in the above passage. This better time is also in view in our text, which looks forward to a time when “instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off” (Isaiah 55:13). God has triumphed over evil!

And this all points ahead to the eventual removal of the great curse that now dominates creation because of man’s sin (Genesis 3:14-19). For the present, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22). One day, however, the groaning creation “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption” (Romans 8:21). Therefore, “let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;... Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice” (Psalm 96:11-12). HMM

Tuesday, February 23

Creation and the Constellations

“Which alone spreadeth out the heavens, and treadeth upon the waves of the sea. Which maketh Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades, and the chambers of the south.” (Job 9:8-9)

The book of Job is the oldest book in the Bible. It is not surprising, therefore, that it contains a number of references to creation and the Flood, for these great events were still relatively fresh in the thinking of Job and his contemporaries. The first of these creation references in Job is our text above, and it is remarkable that it centers especially on the stars and their constellations. Still another constellation is mentioned in Job 26:13: “By his spirit he hath garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent.” Finally: “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?” (Job 38:31-33). The term “Mazzaroth” actually means the 12 constellations of the Zodiac.

Thus, God not only created the stars but arranged them in star groupings that could be used for “signs, and for seasons” (Genesis 1:14). Since God does nothing without a holy purpose, we can be sure that these sidereal signs were not to be used as astrological signs. God’s Word, in fact, forbids the practice of astrology (e.g., Isaiah 47:12-14). The constellations must all in some way have testified of the coming Savior. “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).

Before the Scriptures were given, the testimony of God’s primeval promises had somehow been written indelibly in the heavens for those in Earth’s earliest ages who had eyes and hearts to see. HMM

Wednesday, February 24

God's Shadow

"Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings." (Psalm 17:8)

There are 12 references in the Bible to God's "shadow," understood as a type of His invisible but very real guiding presence. The reference in our text above is the first, and there are three other references to this beautiful metaphor—the "shadow" of the wings of God. Psalm 36:7 assures us that men can "put their trust under the shadow of thy wings," and Psalm 57:1 that we can take refuge there "until these calamities be overpast," and then we can "rejoice" there (Psalm 63:7).

The Lord's presence is like "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land," according to Isaiah 32:2. The same prophet quoted God as saying that "I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand" even as He formed the heavens and the earth, while hiding us "in the shadow of his hand" (Isaiah 51:16; 49:2).

Then there is the wonderful promise of Psalm 91:1: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." He can also be "a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall," bringing down "the heat with the shadow of a cloud" (Isaiah 25:4-5). Similarly, He is "a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain" (Isaiah 4:6).

The last reference speaks of "the anointed of the LORD" (that is, of the Messiah, Jesus Christ), assuring God's people that "under his shadow we shall live among the heathen" (Lamentations 4:20). These are all "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4). Hidden under the shadow of God is indeed a good and safe place to be in times like these. HMM

Thursday, February 25

The God Who Provides

“Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.” (Romans 15:13)

God’s provisions for the believer include far more than physical necessities. These are indicated by seven beautiful titles ascribed to Him in the New Testament.

The God of love: First of all, we need love, and “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Then “the fruit of the Spirit is love” in our lives (Galatians 5:22) because He Himself is “the God of love and peace” (2 Corinthians 13:11).

The God of all grace: God saves us by His grace, and then we need to “grow in grace” (2 Peter 3:18). This we can do because “the God of all grace...hath called us unto his eternal glory” (1 Peter 5:10).

The God of peace: He satisfies the need for peace of soul in the believer’s life, and He is called “the God of peace” five times in the New Testament (Romans 15:33; 16:20; Philip-
pians 4:9; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; Hebrews 13:20).

The God of all comfort: Our God is called “the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort,” because He “comforteth us in all our tribulation,” thus enabling us also to provide comfort to others” by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

The God of patience: We do “have need of patience” (Hebrews 10:36), and this need also is supplied by “the God of patience and consolation” (Romans 15:5).

The God of glory: It was “the God of glory” who first called Abraham (Acts 7:2), and through the Word we also “are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The God of hope: By His Spirit He fills us with joy and peace, with power, and abundant hope—blessing us “with all spiritual blessings...in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). HMM

The Wicked Man

“The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.” (Psalm 10:4)

It is significant that the word “wicked” does not necessarily mean morally depraved or violently dangerous. It is essentially synonymous with “ungodly,” and the Hebrew word used here (*rasha*) is often so translated. This tenth psalm provides a graphic summary of their real character. They are:

1. Proud. “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God” (v. 4).

2. Fawning. “For the wicked...blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth” (v. 3).

3. Atheistic, at least in behavior. “He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten:...he will never see it” (v. 11).

4. Stubborn. “He hath said in his heart, I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity” (v. 6).

5. Profane. “His mouth is full of cursing....under his tongue is mischief and vanity” (v. 7).

6. Hurtful. “In the secret places doth he murder the innocent” (v. 8). This surely applies to character assassination, when not to actual killing.

7. Deceptive. “His mouth is full of...deceit and fraud:... He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den” (vv. 7, 9).

It is significant that the apostle Paul cited verse 7 (“full of cursing”) as descriptive of most of the ancient pagans in his day, and it can sadly be applied to many modern pagans as well.

But David said: “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not” (Psalm 37:35-36). “For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Psalm 1:6). HMM

Saturday, February 27

The Firstborn of Every Creature

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.” (Colossians 1:15)

A widespread cult heresy based on this verse claims that Jesus Christ was not eternal but merely the first being created—perhaps an angel—before becoming a man. Note, however, that the verse does not say He was the “first created of every creature” but the “first born of every creature,” and there is a big difference. In fact, the very next verse says that “by him were all things created” (v. 16). He was never created, for He Himself is the Creator. “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3).

He is “born” of God, not “made,” the “only begotten Son” of God (John 3:16). “No man hath seen God at any t`ime; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him” (John 1:18). The eternal Father is omnipresent, and therefore invisible, inaudible, inaccessible to the physical senses. The eternally existing Son is the “image” of the invisible Father, the One who declares, reveals, embodies His essence. Although He is always “in the bosom of the Father,” yet He is eternally also “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:3). He is the eternal, living Word, which was “in the beginning with God” (John 1:2), and which “was God” (John 1:1).

Thus, the phrase “firstborn of every creature” in our text can be translated literally as “begotten before all creation.” The eternal inter-relationship of the Persons of the Godhead is beyond human comprehension in its fullness, and the terms “Son” and “begotten” are the best human language can do to describe it. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is the only begotten, eternally generated Son of the Father, forever shining forth as the image of the otherwise invisible God. HMM

Rejection at Home

“But Jesus, said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.” (Mark 6:4)

A town will give great honor to a “hometown boy” if he makes good in athletics or the entertainment world. But if he becomes known as an influential Christian, the hometown folks usually are embarrassed about it.

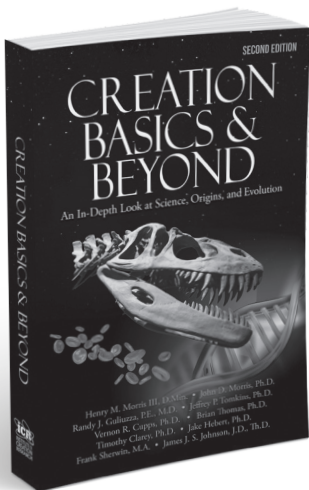
Jesus Himself experienced this. He grew up in Nazareth, and it was there that He had “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:52). When He returned to Nazareth, however, after the early days of His ministry, “as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16). He was already recognized there as proficient in the Scriptures, and they had heard tales about His miracles, so the invitation to speak was natural, but there were certain mumbles. “Is not this the carpenter’s son?” they asked. “Whence then hath this man all these things?” (Matthew 13:55-56).

At first, “all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth” (Luke 4:22). But then, as He applied a key prophecy to Himself and rebuked them for their unbelief, they “were filled with wrath” and tried unsuccessfully to slay Him (Luke 4:28-29). “Neither did his brethren believe in him” (John 7:5), and only His mother was with Him when He was crucified (John 19:25). As David had written prophetically, “I am become a stranger unto my brethren.... For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up” (Psalm 69:8-9).

Perhaps those Christians who have been rejected by their family and former friends can identify with Jesus when He said: “For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother” (Mark 3:35). We still have a family—an eternal one! HMM



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