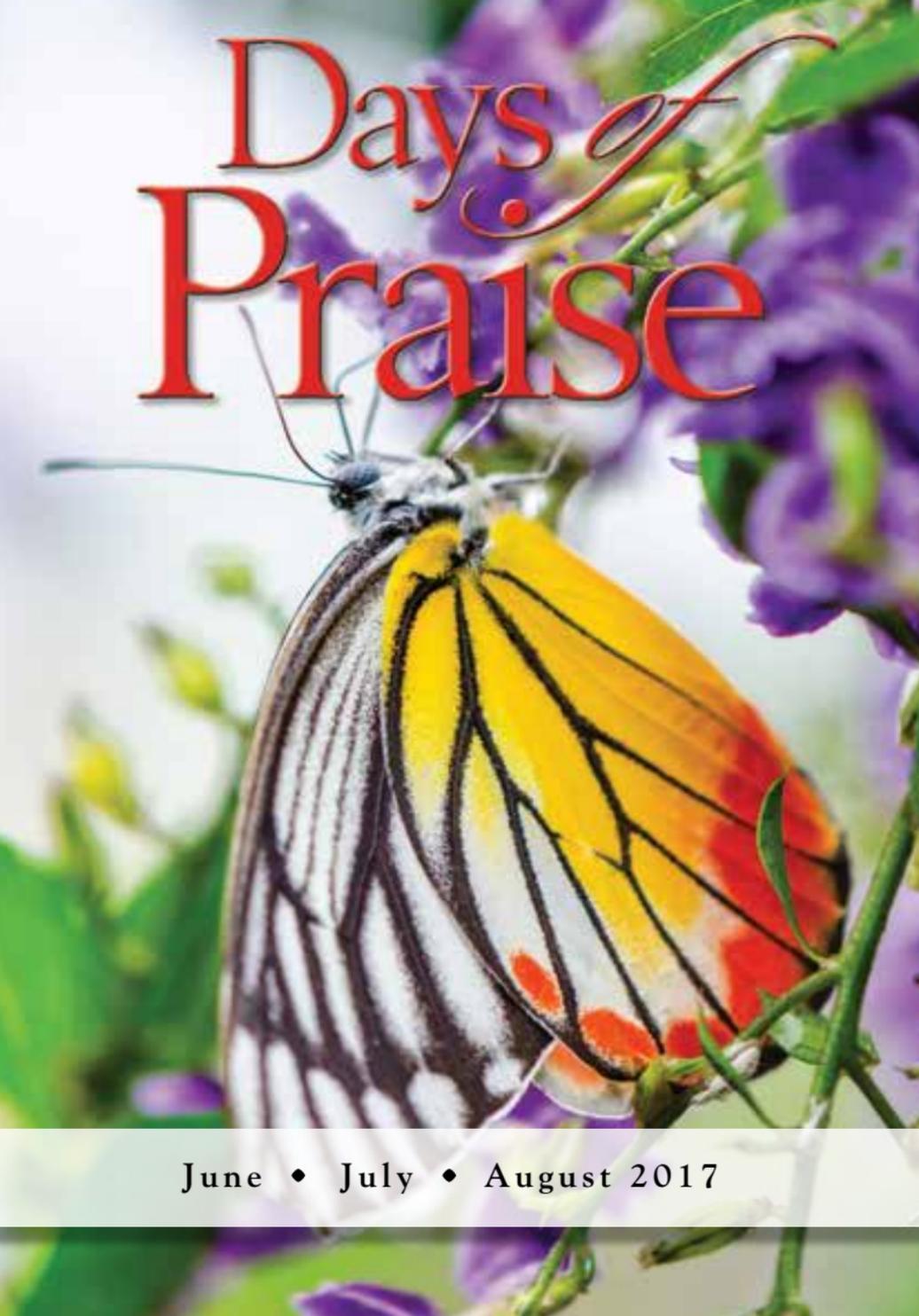


Days of Praise

A close-up photograph of a glasswing butterfly (Glossy Ibis) perched on a purple flower. The butterfly's wings are primarily yellow with prominent black veins and a white border. The hindwings feature a gradient of orange and red. The background is a soft-focus field of purple flowers and green foliage.

June • July • August 2017

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

June • July • August 2017

*“O taste and see that the LORD is good:
blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”
(Psalm 34:8)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

*“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.”
(1 Timothy 2:1-2)*

Dear Christian friend,

Many things are going on in our country and our world these days—and there is not much that any of us can do about any of it except remind ourselves of the promises of Scripture and the command to pray for those who have the responsibility to govern.

Paul reminds us that “there is no power but of God” (Romans 13:1), and in his message to the academics of Athens Paul reminded them that the great Creator God “made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26).

We may not know what is coming next, but we do know the One who is setting the agenda for what is coming next and can rest in His sovereign will.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

Contributors:

HMM

HMM III

JDM

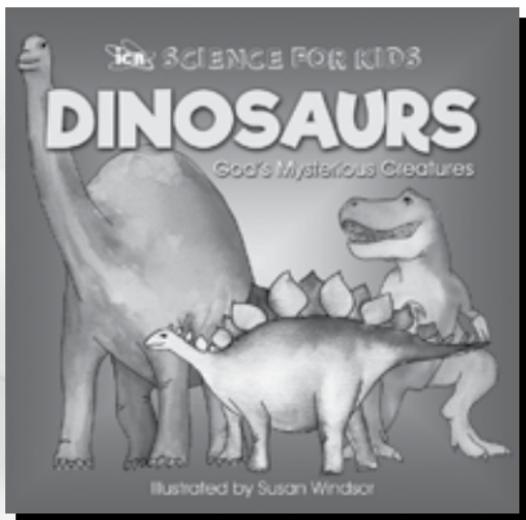
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Thursday, June 1

The Furtherance of the Gospel

“But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.” (Philippians 1:12)

The infrequently used word “furtherance” (meaning simply “advancement”) occurs elsewhere only in Philippians 1:25, where Paul speaks of the “furtherance and joy of faith,” which he hoped to see in the Christians at Philippi, and in 1 Timothy 4:15, where it is translated “profiting.” There, Paul urged young Timothy to continue studying the things of God “that thy profiting may appear to all.”

Paul wrote this epistle while he was unjustly imprisoned in a Roman jail, and no doubt he remembered the time when he had first met many of his Philippian Christian friends as a result of being imprisoned and beaten in a Philippian jail (Acts 16:12-40). In fact, he had often been imprisoned (2 Corinthians 11:23) and had suffered severely in many other ways for “the furtherance of the gospel.”

Indeed, during the two years or more he was a prisoner in Rome, he not only taught God’s Word to many who visited him there (Acts 28:30-31) but also wrote at least four of his inspired epistles there (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon—possibly even Hebrews). And these have been of untold blessing to millions down through the years. In ways that Paul could never have imagined, it was true indeed that these things that had happened to him had “fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.”

The apostle Paul had the spiritual insight to realize that what seemed like great problems and difficulties could be used by God to the “advancement” of the gospel. Rather than complaining or even quitting when the Christian life gets hard, we must remember that God can make even “the wrath of man” to bring praise to Him (Psalm 76:10). HMM

Friday, June 2

The Redeemed of the Lord

“Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.” (Psalm 107:2)

This hymn of praise for God’s providence centers around four examples of God’s deliverance from particular problems. The four situations are as follows: Lost travelers who are out of provisions far from a city (vv. 4-5), prisoners imprisoned for their own rebelliousness (vv. 1-12), those who have been brought to physical illness due to their sin (vv. 17-18), and sailors who face shipwreck on stormy seas (vv. 23-27). In each case, the individuals prayed for deliverance that resulted in God’s miraculous rescue and a response of praise.

This cycle reminds us of the pattern during the time of the Judges when “every man did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). Due to their rebelliousness, God brought the people of Israel into captivity over and over again. Each time, in the midst of their oppression, they cried unto the Lord, who raised up a judge and empowered him to vanquish the enemy and free the people.

The exact same pattern can be found in Solomon’s prayer of dedication for the temple. He recognized man’s tendency to rebel and forget the Lord’s provision when things are going well, thus eliciting God’s judgment. But God has always used times of trouble to bring men and women back to Himself. He is a God of grace and mercy and love, desiring to forgive and restore those who repent and call to Him for deliverance (2 Kings 8).

The same truth applies today. We still tend to rebel, and He remains long-suffering, willing to forgive and restore upon repentance. “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7). JDM

Saturday, June 3

Secret Faults vs. Presumptuous Sins

“Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.” (Psalm 19:12-13)

David, the author of this majestic psalm of praise to God for His revelation of Himself and His nature to man, voices his own frustration at his inability to mold his life totally in accordance with God’s revealed plan. He recognizes and asks for God’s forgiveness for his failure to measure up, and asks for strength to avoid habitual sin patterns and willful rejection of God’s way.

God had already made a careful distinction between these types of sins. “The priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. . . . But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously . . . the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him” (Numbers 15:28, 30-31).

Paul also recognized such a difference. Keep in mind that all sin is abhorrent to God and must be repented of, resulting, of course, in His forgiveness. But Paul claimed that even his blasphemous, murderous persecution of the church was done “ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Timothy 1:13). His plea of ignorance did not excuse his guilt, but through it he “obtained mercy” (v. 13) and “grace” (v. 14).

This is a “pattern to [us] which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (v. 16). Let us not be guilty of willful, presumptuous sin, but on these occasions when we do fall, we can be thankful that our “longsuffering” (v. 16) Savior still affords us such mercy. JDM

The Family of a Disciple

“Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God’s sake, Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.” (Luke 18:28-30)

Unfortunately, this and parallel passages have been wrongly used all too often to justify the abandonment of responsibilities to family in the name of following Christ.

But Christ is not here advocating repudiation of family. Instead, He insists that our allegiance be to Him and to His will. Nothing must be allowed to usurp His rightful position of supremacy in our lives. While it is true that for some a life unencumbered by family duties may result in more efficient ministry (1 Corinthians 7:1-9, 25-38), family relationships and responsibilities are of great importance to Him (vv. 10-24; see also many other passages).

Consider the case of Elisha. God had instructed Elijah to train Elisha to take his place as prophet (1 Kings 19:16). Finding Elisha plowing in his father’s field (i.e., family duties) with 12 yoke of oxen, “Elijah passed by him, and cast his mantle upon him” (v. 19).

Elisha knew immediately that he was facing a dramatic change in his life. He did not refuse, argue with, or try to alter the call, but he did recognize a responsibility to his parents. “Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee” (v. 20). Elijah agreed. To solidify his determination to leave, Elisha immediately sacrificed a pair of oxen, using as fuel the plowing instruments he had been using. He was, in effect, making a clean break with his former life, yet honoring and respecting his parents. “Then he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him” (v. 21). JDM

Monday, June 5

The Gardens of the Lord

“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples.” (John 18:1)

As Jesus, after the last supper with His disciples, walked out with them, they soon crossed over a small brook and entered the little garden called Gethsemane. Eventually, He left the disciples and went farther into the garden alone for a time of solitary prayer.

Perhaps He remembered how, long ago, He had walked in His first garden with Adam and Eve in beautiful fellowship. But then they had rebelled against His Word and had to be expelled from the Garden of Eden, leaving Him alone there also (Genesis 3:8).

As He prayed in Gethsemane, He knew that it would be only a few hours before He would be buried in still another garden, one “wherein was never man yet laid” (John 19:41). He would be carried to a new tomb prepared in a newly planted garden by the loving hands of Joseph and Nicodemus, but then He would be alone once again.

He had walked alone in the first garden, seeking His own; then had knelt alone in the second garden, praying for His own; and finally was buried alone in the third garden, after dying for His own.

But because He came “to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10), and because He now “ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25) after paying the awful price of “redemption through his blood” (Ephesians 1:7), all those who believe and trust Him will spend eternity in fellowship with Him in a beautiful garden city. Here flows “a pure river of water of life” surrounded on both sides by “the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month” (Revelation 22:1-2), and all will be “very good” forever. HMM

Sowing Continually

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”
(Ecclesiastes 11:6)

In the Bible, the common occupation of sowing seed is frequently used as a symbol of witnessing for the Lord. Unlike an actual farmer, however, Christian seed-sowers are to engage in their occupation perpetually, day after day, morning and evening, everywhere they go. “Cast thy bread upon the waters,” the wise preacher said, “for thou shalt find it after many days” (Ecclesiastes 11:1). The sowing is often difficult but is necessary before the fruit can grow, and the promise is that “they that sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Psalm 126:5).

Often others may reap the fruit of our seed-sowing labors (or we may reap the fruit of theirs), but that is all right, for Christ Himself said that “one soweth, and another reapeth” so that “both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together” (John 4:37, 36). Paul said, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Some seed, faithfully sown, may not seem to grow at all. In Christ’s great parable of the sower, much of the seed fell by the wayside or on rocky or weed-infested ground, but “other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit” (Matthew 13:8). It is our job to be sure that the seed we sow is good seed, wherever we go—by word, by life, by giving, by listening, by our very presence, by praying, by whatever we say or do or even think—and then to trust God to bring forth the fruit according to His own perfect will.

“Blessed are ye that sow beside all waters” (Isaiah 32:20). Therefore, “in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening,” and God will prosper our faithfulness in His own good way and time. HMM

Wednesday, June 7

The Battle for Purity

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.”
(2 Timothy 2:19)

One of Paul’s major messages to his young disciple Timothy was to strive for purity in every area of his life. Compromise and impurity were not to be glossed over; they were to be vigorously opposed.

Concerning purity in doctrine, Paul charged, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). He was to “charge” his followers not to wrangle over trivial issues and not to listen to false teaching (v. 14). They were to “shun” vulgar and empty talk, knowing that such will only lead to more impurity and doubt (vv. 16-18). Furthermore, he was to actively “oppose” those who taught or lived by any other code, doing everything possible to “recover” those ensnared by satanic lies (vv. 25-26).

A prerequisite for an effective battle for purity in doctrine is purity in character. A Christian leader must be prepared for the work. “If a man therefore purge himself from these [i.e., false teaching, practices, and attitudes], he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (v. 21).

Finally, a Christian leader must have proper and pure relationships with both those who are under his influence and those who must be opposed. “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” (vv. 24-25). This is a difficult task, but as in our text, our foundation is sure, and we are known fully by the One who leads and empowers us in the work ahead. JDM

Thursday, June 8

The Days of Youth

“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.” (Ecclesiastes 11:9)

When one reaches maturity and, finally, old age, he will almost inevitably find himself recalling wistfully the days of his youth. Often there will be feelings of regret for wasted opportunities and sinful living, and he would urge young people not to make the same mistakes that he did.

Unfortunately, most young people tend to listen more to their peers than to their seniors. As the old cliché has it—“too soon old, and too late smart.” So the cycle continues, generation after generation.

There have been godly exceptions, of course, such as Mary and Daniel and Timothy, and some today as well, who have maintained a strong stand and witness for God and His Word all their lives. As our text (written by King Solomon in his old age) indicates, youth can and should be a time of real joy, but the best joy is “the joy of the LORD” (Nehemiah 8:10). Such joy is true pleasure and happiness, and is much better than mere “fun.”

Our text also confirms that a judgment day is coming, and the misdeeds of youth will be judged along with all the rest. Especially good advice was given by Solomon in his next two verses. “Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh” (Ecclesiastes 11:10–12:1). Paul advised young Timothy, “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). HMM

Friday, June 9

From Disciples to Brethren

“Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.” (John 20:17)

It is interesting to note that our Lord never called His disciples “brethren” until after His resurrection, and our text, which identifies them as such, was the first thing He uttered after rising from the dead, at least as recorded in Scripture.

Until then He had referred to them in a variety of ways, including “little children” (John 13:33), “brethren,” in the sense of brothers in a family (Matthew 12:49), and even “friends.”

“Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). Certainly the disciples held a special place in Christ’s heart.

But it was not until He had risen from the dead, He who was “the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18), the “firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Corinthians 15:20), that His disciples, and indeed all who would “believe on [Him] through their word” (John 17:20), could be made “sons of God” (Romans 8:14). “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). This high standing comes as a fulfillment of His determination to “be the firstborn among many brethren” (v. 29).

He has relabeled the “great congregation” (Psalm 22:22, 25 quoted in Hebrews 2:12) the “church,” identifying the individual members as His “brethren,” and is not “ashamed” to do so (Hebrews 2:11). As we see in our text, His God is our God, His Father is our Father; in all ways, we who have believed on Him are His brothers. Oh, what a standing is ours! JDM

Saturday, June 10

God-Hardened Hearts

“For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses.” (Joshua 11:20)

One of the most bitter complaints of critics against the Bible is its portrayal of the severity of God, especially in His command to Moses to destroy all the Canaanites. “When the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them” (Deuteronomy 7:2). This seems more severe than ever when we read in our text that God Himself hardened the hearts of the Canaanites so that Joshua could destroy them.

But the notion that God is merely a kindly grandfather figure is a self-serving figment of man’s sinful imagination. The New Testament reminds us that “our God is a consuming fire” and “the wages of sin is death” (Hebrews 12:29; Romans 6:23), and God doesn’t change. “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

As far as the Canaanites were concerned, God had given them 400 years to repent (Genesis 15:13-16), but each new generation had gone further away from God than the one before, and they were practicing (as archaeology has revealed) every form of debauchery known to man. It was an act of mercy by God toward all those who would come in contact with them in future generations to decree their destruction now. They had already irrevocably hardened their hearts toward God, so God now hardened their hearts against Israel. Thinking they could destroy God’s people, they only hastened their well-deserved end. HMM

Sunday, June 11

The Discipline of Patience

“But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (James 1:4)

Patience, or endurance, is part of the development that produces the experience that brings hope and assurance to those who are the twice-born (Romans 5:3-5). Patience is a discipline—a “work” that is necessary for our growth. Although such discipline never seems pleasant at the time, it is administered by our loving heavenly Father, who focuses His work on our spiritual maturity (Hebrews 12:5-8).

Our text contains several key aspects that promise victory through the process of learning patience. Wisdom is granted liberally as we ask for it during the testings that produce the “perfect work” (James 1:4) of patience. As those who love the Lord endure the testings that will surely come, the endurance practiced will produce a “crown of life” (James 1:12) as an eternal testimony to our patience.

Psalm 37 outlines the principles for gaining patience during this life. First, “trust in the LORD” (Psalm 37:3) and follow His leading in everything you do (Proverbs 3:5-10).

Second, delight in the Lord—get excited about Him (Psalm 37:4). That trait is amplified often in Psalm 119 (Psalm 119:16, 24, 35, 47, 70, 174). Then, commit your way to the Lord (Psalm 37:5), becoming like a branch attached to the vine (John 15:4-7).

Finally, rest in the Lord (Psalm 37:7) and wait on Him (Psalm 37:34). That doesn’t mean just “hang around.” It means to be a fully prepared servant, waiting for his master’s orders to implement. The “profitable” servant (Luke 17:10) learns what his master wants and stands ready to respond to the needs of the Kingdom.

Patience is never obtained through bored indifference.
HMM III

Monday, June 12

Pray without Ceasing

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” (Ephesians 6:18)

It is obvious that Paul’s command to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) is to be understood metaphorically (after all, we do have to sleep and work, as well as pray), but it is also to be taken seriously.

Even during waking hours, of course, the attitude of unceasing general prayer is not meant to supersede special periods of concentrated prayer. Jesus spoke thus of the importance of intense private prayer: “When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret” (Matthew 6:6). Christ Himself has set an example: “In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35).

There is also an important role for group prayer meetings. “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed” (James 5:16). “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 18:19).

The words of our text, however, conclude the great passage on the armor of the Christian as he or she engages in daily combat with the wicked one. They imply not a continual verbalized prayer but a continual attitude of prayer and watchfulness whereby it becomes easy and natural to breathe a short (but sincere) prayer “in the Spirit” whenever a need appears (e.g., a special need for strength or guidance in a situation, or intercession for someone else). Thus, whether at work or at rest, we can—as Paul exhorts—“continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Colossians 4:2). HMM

Tuesday, June 13

Waxing Old, like a Garment

“Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.” (Psalm 102:25-27)

This remarkable passage, quoted also in Hebrews 1:10-12, anticipates the famous second law of thermodynamics, or law of entropy, indicating that everything in the physical universe is growing old and wearing out. God created everything in the beginning, winding it up like a great clock, so to speak. Because of sin and the curse, however, it has been running down and “perishing” ever since. Jesus also said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away” (literally “are passing away”) (Matthew 24:35).

This universal scientific law is also anticipated in Isaiah 51:6: “The earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner.” That is, the law of decay and death applies both to the earth and its inhabitants. The concept of universal evolution is clearly refuted both by Scripture and true science.

Note that our text also anticipates that, although the earth is growing old and seems about to die, it will suddenly be changed, like a garment. The old garment will be discarded and a new garment put on. Peter puts it this way: “The heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:12-13).

Now, although the universe is perishing and will one day be suddenly renewed, its Creator never changes. His years will never end, and His Word and His righteousness will never pass away. HMM

True Love

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.” (Song of Solomon 8:7)

The Song of Solomon, as part of God’s inspired Word, is much more than an ancient erotic poem, as some have interpreted it. Solomon was given great wisdom by God, so that he “spake three thousand proverbs; and his songs were a thousand and five” (1 Kings 4:32). Of these latter, he apparently considered this to be his masterpiece, his “song of songs” (Song 1:1). It can best be understood as a pure love song describing the courtship and marriage of Solomon and his first bride, long before he later married “many strange [that is, ‘foreign’] women” (1 Kings 11:1) who “turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kings 11:4).

Another interpretation, favored by many Bible scholars over the centuries, is that the story is an allegory whose theme is the love of Christ and His heavenly bride, the true church.

That is, it really does seem to describe the love of young Solomon and his first bride. Such love had and still has God’s blessing, for the union of man and woman in permanent, loving marriage has always been God’s plan, ever since Adam and Eve (note Christ’s confirmation of this in Matthew 19:3-9). It is “the works of the flesh,” including adultery and fornication, that God condemns.

But the song can also bring great blessing to the reader as he sees therein the eternal love of the Lord Jesus and His heavenly bride. Our text verse, read in this light, is a glorious truth. Not even the waters of a great flood could quench such love, nor all the possessions of a wealthy king ever purchase it. It is true eternal love, bought by the blood of the Bridegroom and received with undying faith by His beloved bride. HMM

Thursday, June 15

Delight in the Will of God

“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” (Psalm 40:8)

This remarkable testimony of David is actually also a Messianic prophecy, fulfilled completely only in Christ. Only as Messiah could He truly say, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me” and “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me”; “The works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me” (John 4:34; 6:38; 10:25). “Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith . . . Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:5, 7).

His heart was attuned perfectly to the will of God because God’s law was written thereon, “not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart” (2 Corinthians 3:3). Even in the most trying circumstances to which any man could ever be subjected, He could pray, “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

By the indwelling Spirit of God, we also must seek to make the will of God our greatest delight. We are saved solely by grace, but this is not to deliver us from the burdensome constraints of God’s holy law; as in the case of Christ Himself, He places His law in our hearts in order to enable us to love His law. “This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them” (Hebrews 10:16).

Then we learn, like the psalmist, not to resist His will but to love His will and to delight in His law. “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day. . . . Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage for ever: for they are the rejoicing of my heart. . . . I have longed for thy salvation, O LORD; and thy law is my delight” (Psalm 119:97, 111, 174). HMM

Be Ye Separate

“Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18)

The doctrine of separation from “the unclean thing” is neglected today by professing Christians, but it is still here in God’s Word. The context indicates that Paul is warning against Christians being “unequally yoked together with unbelievers” and urging us to “cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 6:14; 7:1).

Such separation does not mean having no contact at all with unbelievers, “for then must ye needs go out of the world” (1 Corinthians 5:10), whereas Jesus commanded, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). He also prayed to the Father, “not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15).

He does demand, however, that we are not to compromise with unbelief or with the unclean thing. We are “born again” into the family of God through simple faith in the person and saving work of Christ; but the full manifestation and fellowship of our relation with the heavenly Father as His spiritual sons and daughters is evidently, in this passage, conditioned on the vital principle of separation from all unbelief and filthiness of the flesh, with Jesus as our example (Hebrews 7:26).

We are specially warned to “turn away” from those who, “having a form of godliness,” attempt to accommodate the naturalistic viewpoint of modern scientism within the Scriptures, thus “denying the power thereof” (2 Timothy 3:5). “Be ye separate, saith the Lord.” HMM

Saturday, June 17

The Necessary Light

“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” (Acts 26:18)

All human experience understands the relationship between darkness and light. Those who love wickedness crave the darkness to hide their deeds (John 3:19).

Jesus insisted that He is the “light of the world” (John 8:12). Now in His glorified state, the Lord Jesus—our King of kings and Lord of lords—is described as “dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto” (1 Timothy 6:16). This is not a mere metaphor. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

It is certainly clear in the Scriptures that those who have not yet been twice born must come “to the light” before they can ever receive the gift of eternal light (John 3:20). Indeed, the very process of “coming” is empowered by the drawing power of the Godhead Himself (John 6:44). No one who is “dead in trespasses and sin” (Ephesians 2:1) is able to come out of darkness on their own into the light without the supernatural power of the “light” Himself.

Once we are rescued from the darkness by the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus and “birthed” from above by the power demonstrated in the resurrection of our Lord, we who are so redeemed become “children of light” (1 Thessalonians 5:5). Thus empowered, we are to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7) and have no “fellowship . . . with darkness” (2 Corinthians 6:14). With the “armour of light” complete (Romans 13:12), we can openly let our “light so shine” that we become a “light of the world” (Matthew 5:16, 14). HMM III

Sunday, June 18

The Father of Spirits

“Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?” (Hebrews 12:9)

In these days when parents are urged by special interest and political groups not to discipline their children, and children’s rights are championed at the expense of parental authority, it is comforting to read in Scripture that the normal response to parental discipline is reverence. Thankfully, even most secular “experts” today recognize the child’s need for parental guidelines, reinforced by physical discipline as appropriate.

But this passage is primarily discussing the role of chastening father that God plays in the lives of His spiritual children. “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord . . . for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth. . . . But if ye be without chastisement . . . then are ye . . . not sons” (vv. 5-8). This discipline is “for our profit” (v. 10) and “yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (v. 11) in our lives. The natural response should be both “reverence” and “subjection” (v. 9).

In our text, God is identified as the “Father of Spirits,” reminding us that God is Creator. “The LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him” (Zechariah 12:1). He who created all things, including the spiritual side of mankind (Colossians 1:16), recreated each spirit at the time of salvation (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 2:10; etc.). His wise and timely chastening is “for our profit” and has as its goal “that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

On this day of special honor for fathers, let us not forget to honor our heavenly Father. JDM

Monday, June 19

The Beginning of Creation

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” (Revelation 3:14)

This salutation in the last of the seven church epistles in Revelation contains the last of four occurrences of the distinctive phrase “the beginning of the creation.” The glorified Christ here assumes this as one of His divine names. Note that even God’s work of creation, long since completed (Genesis 2:1-3), had a beginning, and that beginning was Christ. “In the beginning was the Word . . . All things were made by him” (John 1:1, 3).

The first two occurrences of this phrase also come from the lips of Christ. “From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female” (Mark 10:6). This assertion by the Creator, Jesus Christ (quoting Genesis 1:27), makes it unambiguously certain that Adam and Eve were created at the beginning of creation, not after the earth had already existed for 4.5 billion years. God also wrote this plainly on the tables of the law (Exodus 20:8-11). Those evangelicals who accept the geological ages evidently reject this clear statement of the creation’s Creator!

Then Christ also referred to the end-times in the context of the beginning-times. “In those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be” (Mark 13:19).

The phrase is also used in Peter’s very important prophecy concerning the scoffers of the end-times who will argue (in willful ignorance) that “all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Peter 3:3-4), thereby denying that there ever was a real creation or real Creator and thus rejecting Christ Himself. But He is also the “true witness” and the “Amen,” and such denials will only be “unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16). HMM

Tuesday, June 20

Wars and Rumors of Wars

“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.” (Matthew 24:6)

Christians are often chided because they are looking for the return of Christ rather than improving this present world. The fact is, however, that Bible-believing Christians have been largely responsible for such improvements in this world as have actually been achieved (elimination of slavery, establishment of hospitals and educational institutions, founding and development of modern science, advances in political freedoms, etc.).

On the other hand, Christ predicted that wars would continue despite His own death and resurrection. In fact, the prophet Daniel had prophesied over five centuries earlier that “unto the end of the war desolations are determined” (Daniel 9:26). For 2,500 years the prophecies have been fulfilled and will continue to be fulfilled until Christ returns. In that day, God promises: “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” However, it is not the misguided efforts of secularists and worldly minded Christians that will bring about this state of eternal peace and righteousness. “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isaiah 9:7).

Our text is taken from Christ’s Olivet discourse, given in answer to His disciples’ questions about His Second Coming (Matthew 24-25). Climaxing His message, He said, “Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). The wicked, warring nations of the earth all will mourn (not rejoice over!) His coming. In the meantime, He urges all true Christians to “be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44). HMM

Wednesday, June 21

Enoch: A Man of Faith

“And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.” (Genesis 5:24)

Surely one of the most godly, as well as interesting, characters who ever lived was Enoch. He is one of only two who lived before the Flood (Noah also, Genesis 6:9) of whom it is said that he “walked with God.” He is also one of only two individuals who never died (Elijah, 2 Kings 2:11). Little is known about him, but the Bible reveals him to be exemplary among men and special to God.

Notice that he was, first of all, a man of faith. “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; . . . he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is [i.e., that God exists], and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Hebrews 11:5-6). Enoch had ample faith in the fact and work of God, which yielded a close walk with God. He also had faith in the caring character of God that rewards the diligent search for Him on His terms with sanctification, fellowship, and eternal life. This faith, we are told, pleased God.

We find in the little book of Jude a description of Enoch’s ministry. Enoch’s faith impelled him to denounce strongly the false teaching and ungodly living of his day, prophesying the coming return of, and judgment by, the Lord (Jude 1:14-15).

Some have suggested that Enoch’s ministry is not yet over. All men die, for “it is appointed unto men once to die” (Hebrews 9:27), and Enoch has not yet died. Perhaps he is one of the two tribulation “witnesses” (Revelation 11:3) whose messages are so much like those of Enoch and Elijah who will be martyred, resurrected, and taken up to heaven directly from Earth (vv. 4-12). At any rate, Enoch is certainly one of the great heroes of the faith whom we shall meet some day. JDM

Thursday, June 22

The Blood of the Lamb

“And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” (Revelation 12:11)

This is the last reference in the Bible to the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ; here, it is the overcoming blood, enabling believers to withstand the deceptions and accusations of Satan.

There are at least 43 references to the blood of Christ in the New Testament, all testifying to its great importance in the salvation and daily life of the believer. Judas the betrayer spoke of it as “innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4), and Peter called it “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). It is the cleansing blood in 1 John 1:7 and the washing blood in Revelation 1:5, stressing that it removes the guilt of our sins.

Paul calls it the purchasing blood in Acts 20:28 and the redeeming blood twice (Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; see also 1 Peter 1:18-19; Revelation 5:9), thus declaring the shedding of His blood to be the very price of our salvation. Therefore, it is also the justifying blood (Romans 5:9) and the peacemaking blood (Colossians 1:20). Its efficacy does not end with our salvation, however, for it is also the sanctifying blood (Hebrews 13:12). There is infinite and eternal power in the blood of Christ, for it is “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (v. 20).

The first reference in the New Testament to His blood stresses this aspect. Jesus said at the last supper, “This is my blood of the new testament [same as ‘covenant’], which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28). Let no one, therefore, ever count the “blood of the covenant . . . an unholy thing” (Hebrews 10:29), for the blood of Christ is forever innocent, infinitely precious, perfectly justifying, always cleansing, and fully sanctifying. HMM

Friday, June 23

In Christ Jesus

“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1)

One of the key doctrines of Christianity is the union of the believer with Christ. In fact, the expression “in Christ” or its equivalent is found over 160 times in Paul’s epistles alone. Since, in God’s sight, we are “in Him,” all His attributes and accomplishments are credited to us as well.

For example, Paul said even to the carnal Corinthians that “of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). To the Romans (see today’s verse) he said that being in Christ frees us from the judgment, since Christ has already borne our judgment.

To the Galatians, Paul emphasized that “ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). The Ephesian epistle has many such expressions, the most comprehensive being Ephesians 1:3: “[God] hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” To the Philippians, he promised that “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). The Christians at Colosse were assured that “ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:10).

Even when we die, we “sleep in Jesus” and, when He comes again, “the dead in Christ shall rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16). Paul even wrote to Timothy that God’s “own purpose and grace” had been “given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Timothy 1:9). These are only a few examples of the marvelous blessings shared by all who are “in Christ Jesus.” We should be willing gladly to acknowledge “every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus” (Philemon 1:6). HMM

Handfuls of Purpose

“And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.” (Ruth 2:16)

This verse contains the unusual instruction of Boaz to his servants concerning Ruth after she asked if she could glean after the reapers in his field of barley. Not only did Boaz allow her to do so but also commanded his servants to “let fall some of the handfuls of purpose” for her, thus making her task easier.

It is interesting that the same Hebrew word, basically meaning “take a spoil,” is used twice in this verse, once translated “let fall” and once as “of purpose.” The word for “handfuls,” used only this once in the Bible, evidently refers to a hand’s “grip.” Although all the translations seem to have difficulty with it, Boaz seems actually to be saying, in effect, to his servants: “Grab as though you were taking a spoil for her from the bundles of sheaves, and leave them as a spoil for her.” This was to be a deliberate and purposeful gift on Boaz’s part, but Ruth was not to know so that she could assume she had gleaned it all on her own.

Boaz, therefore, like his distant descendant (through his soon-to-be bride, Ruth), Jesus Christ, provided that which represented the bread of life as a gracious gift to his coming bride. In this, as in other ways, Boaz is a type of Christ and Ruth is a type of each believer destined for union with Him.

But the sheaves also represent the Word of God from which we daily can glean life-giving food for our souls. Our God has been pleased to leave us many “handfuls of purpose” along the way in the fruitful field of Scripture that we can stoop to gather as we go. Our heavenly “Boaz” has paid the price to take the spoil for us, but as we kneel down to glean each morsel, we “rejoice at thy word, as one that findeth great spoil” (Psalm 119:162). HMM

Sunday, June 25

Laughing or Weeping

“Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.” (Ecclesiastes 7:3)

People like to be made to laugh, and many professional comics make a good living telling jokes and doing slapstick comedy. Even in the realm of Christian ministry, those preachers and teachers who can keep their audiences laughing are often the most popular, especially among young people.

No doubt humor has a place, but it needs to be kept in perspective. Solomon had everything and tried everything, including activities promoting laughter and merriment, and was soon disillusioned. “I said in mine heart, . . . I will prove thee with mirth, therefore enjoy pleasure: and, behold, this also is vanity. I said of laughter, It is mad: and of mirth: What doeth it?” (2:1-2).

In fact, some of it does harm, for convivial jesting all too often depends on bawdy humor, especially in today’s movies and television sitcoms. Concerning this problem, the Bible warns, “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, . . . Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting” (Ephesians 5:3-4).

It is significant that we never read of Jesus laughing (nor Paul or any of the other apostles, for that matter), but we do read of Him weeping (Luke 19:41; John 11:35). In fact, He said on one occasion, “Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep” (Luke 6:25). Similarly, the apostle James said, “Be afflicted, and mourn and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness” (James 4:9).

There is much in the Bible encouraging us toward joy and happiness, of course. In a world of tears, we can be “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Corinthians 6:10), knowing that “he that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him” (Psalm 126:6). HMM

Spiritual Entropy

“I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” (1 Corinthians 6:5)

The word for “shame” in this verse is the Greek *entropē*, meaning “turning inward” or “inversion.” It is used only one other time, in 1 Corinthians 15:34: “Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.” Evidently this special variety of shame is associated with taking controversies between Christian brethren to ungodly judges and also with failing to witness to the non-Christian community. Instead of bringing the true wisdom of God to the ungodly, such “entropic Christians” were turning to worldly wisdom to resolve their own spiritual problems. This inverted behavior was nothing less than spiritual confusion!

The modern scientific term “entropy” is essentially this same Greek word. In science, entropy is a measure of disorder in any given system. The universal law of increasing entropy states that every system tends to disintegrate into disorder, or confusion, if left to itself. This tendency can only be reversed if ordering energy is applied to it effectively from a source outside the system.

This universal scientific law has a striking parallel in the spiritual realm. A person turning inward to draw on his own bank of power, or seeking power from an ineffective outside source, will inevitably deteriorate eventually into utter spiritual confusion and death. But when Christ enters the life, that person becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through the Holy Spirit and through the Holy Scriptures, “his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3). The law of spiritual entropy is transformed into the “law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:2). HMM

Tuesday, June 27

The Arm of the Lord

“The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” (Isaiah 52:10)

The human arm is often used in the Bible to symbolize spiritual strength or power. The word is first used in Jacob’s dying prophecy concerning his beloved son Joseph: “But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob” (Genesis 49:24).

The source of all true strength is in the mighty God, so it is not surprising to find at least 40 biblical references to the Lord’s powerful “arm” or “arms.” One of the most striking is our text, promising that when God “bares his arm” for His great work of delivering the lost world from its bondage to Satan and sin and death, then the whole world will see His salvation (literally His “Jesus”).

In a real sense, therefore, “the arm of the Lord” is none other than Jesus Christ. When He came into His world, however, the world refused Him. Just a few verses later, introducing the incomparable 53rd chapter of Isaiah, appears this tragic question: “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1).

Nevertheless, some believed, and the first was His own mother. In her “Magnificat,” spoken in faith before Jesus was born, Mary said, “God my Saviour . . . hath shewed strength with his arm” (Luke 1:47, 51). This confession of faith is the first use of “arm” in the New Testament and again refers to the saving arm of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, His arm is not only mighty to save, but also secure to hold: “His arm shall rule for him. . . . He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom” (Isaiah 40:10-11). HMM

Scattered Abroad

“Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.” (Acts 8:4)

God has given two great commissions to His people, both of which would require worldwide effort to accomplish. Both, however, were so resisted that God Himself had to step in and force His people to be obedient.

Immediately after the great Flood, God gave the following command: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Genesis 9:1). This was an extension of the Edenic mandate given to Adam in the beginning, a commission to fill the earth and exercise dominion over it under God (1:28). Noah’s descendants, however, decided to stay in Babel and “make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” As a result of this rebellion, “the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth” (11:4, 9).

Over 2,000 years later, the Lord gave His disciples another great worldwide commission: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Then followed the coming of the Holy Spirit, and soon “the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly” (Acts 6:7).

But they remained in Jerusalem instead of spreading out to “the uttermost part of the earth” (1:8). Therefore, God once again intervened, and “there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem: and they were all scattered abroad” (8:1). Then, finally, began their full obedience to the great commission, for “they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word,” and eventually some “of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” will stand in saving faith before the Lord (Revelation 7:9). HMM

Thursday, June 29

The Unshakable Foundations

“For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart. If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:2-3)

Often we hear or feel the drumbeat of those who oppose the work of God. Many would undermine our faith in God’s promises and try to shake our confidence in the authority of His Word. David’s short answers are wonderful sources of strength for us each day.

Trust in the Lord (Psalm 11:1)—He has not forsaken us (Psalm 9:10), and we can “taste” and see that God is good (Psalm 34:8). No matter what happens, God knows what we need, and He promises that we will be taken care of (Psalm 37:3). If we trust in Him and do not lean on our own wisdom, God promises to direct all of our life decisions (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The Lord is on His throne (Psalm 11:4)—The picture of God’s majesty can be easily lost in our sin-cursed world. If we are not going to be overwhelmed by the wicked, we must see God “high and lifted up”(Isaiah 6:1), surrounded by the great host of heaven, recognizing that “heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool” (Isaiah 66:1).

The Lord sees everything (Psalm 11:4-5)—His “eyes behold the nations” (Psalm 66:7), and He “knoweth the thoughts of man” (Psalm 94:11). There is no place that will hide us from His sight (Psalm 139:7-12).

The Lord judges everything (Psalm 11:5-6)—God loves justice (Psalm 37:28) and will finally come to judge the earth (Psalm 96:13). “The LORD preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow: but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down. The LORD shall reign for ever, even thy God, O Zion, unto all generations. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 146:9-10). HMM III

No More Problems

“Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.”
(Matthew 24:9)

All too often in these days of “easy believism” and the erroneous “peace and prosperity” teaching, we hear someone say, “Once you become a Christian, all your problems will be over.” It is doubtful that anyone really believes such a statement, much less experiences it. Certainly the Israelites who had just been miraculously delivered from bondage didn’t experience it.

Of course, this concept is not biblical. In fact, the Bible teaches quite the opposite. Christ promised, “Ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake” (Matthew 10:22). He, Himself, would have many problems. “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Later, after experiencing many problems, John wrote, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13).

These problems may take the form of general troubles that come from living in a sinful, cursed world; specific afflictions, which God allows in our lives to bring about His purpose; or discipline for personal sin, as well as direct persecution from without.

While troubles will come, all is not lost! Christ promised, “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Through Him we have the strength to meet every difficulty of this life with peace, good cheer, and victory. Through Him we also receive the promise that throughout eternity “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

Saturday, July 1

Called and Chosen

“But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)

Note the order established by God in His great plan of salvation. God had chosen these Thessalonian believers to salvation even before they were born, for it was from the beginning. Then He called them, and they heard the gospel, believed the truth, and were sanctified (that is, “set apart”) by the Holy Spirit, eventually destined to be glorified in Christ.

To accomplish this, however, the Spirit used human messengers. He first, in a vision, directed Paul to go to Greece to preach the gospel (Acts 16:9), where he eventually reached Thessalonica and taught the truth to those he found in the synagogue. However, of the many who were “called” as Paul preached and taught, only “some of them believed” (17:4). Most of his listeners had not been “chosen,” so they resisted the “call” and refused to believe. As Jesus said, “Many be called, but few [are] chosen” (Matthew 20:16).

Such a truth may be difficult to understand with our finite minds, but (like Paul) “we are bound to give thanks” that we who believe today, like the Thessalonian believers then, have been both “chosen . . . in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4) and also “called . . . out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

This same mysterious but glorious truth is found throughout Scripture. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. . . . What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:28, 31). HMM

Sunday, July 2

Always Rejoicing

“Rejoice evermore.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16)

Most people think that John 11:35 (“Jesus wept”) is the shortest verse in the Bible, but our text is actually even shorter in the original Greek. In one sense, these two two-word verses complement each other—because Jesus wept, we can rejoice evermore. Christ died that we might live. He became poor so that we could be eternally rich. When Christ rose from the dead and met the women returning from the empty tomb, He greeted them with the words “All hail” (Matthew 28:9). The actual Greek was the same word as “rejoice,” and surely His victory over sin and death provided the greatest of all reasons for the world to rejoice.

The contrast between suffering and rejoicing is present throughout the New Testament, with the former typically preceding and bringing in the latter. Its first occurrence is in the closing verse of the beatitudes: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you . . . for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:11-12). The final passage, when the sufferings of the saints are all past and Christ comes to reign, the multitude sings in heaven, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come” (Revelation 19:7). In that great day, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes” (Revelation 21:4), and all the redeemed will, indeed, rejoice evermore.

Therefore, we can live our present lives in the light of our future lives, “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things” (2 Corinthians 6:10). The apostle Paul exhorts us to “rejoice in the Lord alway” (Philippians 4:4), and Peter says that, loving Christ, we “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). HMM

Monday, July 3

Worshipping God

“And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.” (Genesis 22:5)

We tend to think of “worship” as singing, or testimonies, or hearing a message. This could hardly be the meaning in our text, however, for Abraham was intending to offer Isaac on a sacrificial altar in accordance with God’s command. Furthermore, Isaac was willing to be offered. “They went both of them together” (vv. 6, 8). Isaac, in fact, was not just a little boy at this time. The word “lad” in our text is the same word as “young men” in the same verse.

The first time the Hebrew word for “worship” is used is in Genesis 18:2. When Abraham saw three men approaching (later revealed as the Lord and two angels), he “bowed himself toward the ground.” Thus, “worship” means, essentially, “bow down” in obedience to the will of the one deserving “worship.”

Abraham’s supreme act of worship, however, was his willingness even to sacrifice his beloved son, if God’s will so required. He trusted so fully in God that he knew “God was able to raise him up, even from the dead” (Hebrews 11:19), and so he could tell his two servants that he and Isaac would “come again to you.” No wonder Abraham is called “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11). He was, indeed, “strong in faith” (v. 20).

The New Testament Greek word for “worship” also means essentially to bow down to God’s will. It occurs first when the wise men came to King Herod seeking the infant Savior, saying: “We . . . are come to worship him” (Matthew 2:2). As long ago a great man on Earth bowed down to the three from heaven, so now these great men on Earth with their three precious gifts bow down to One from heaven, the One who alone is worthy of true worship. HMM

Tuesday, July 4

Glorious Liberty

“Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.” (Romans 8:21)

This verse contains the first of 11 occurrences of the Greek word *eleutheria*, “liberty,” and defines the basic spiritual message of this splendid word. Because of sin, God has subjected the whole creation, animate and inanimate, to “the bondage of corruption.” That is, everything is governed by a law of decay—a law of such universal scope that it is recognized as a basic law of science—the law of entropy, stipulating that everything tends to disintegrate and die.

Christ died for sin, however, and defeated death so that He will someday deliver the whole groaning creation from its bondage into the glorious freedom from decay and death that will also be enjoyed by all who have received eternal life through faith in Christ.

This ultimate, perfect liberty can even now be appropriated in type and principle through looking into “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25), the Holy Scriptures.

When we become children of God, the Holy Spirit henceforth indwells our bodies, and “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

Sometimes, however, Christians may abuse this new freedom from the law of sin and death, turning it into license, and this becomes a tragic perversion of Christian liberty. “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13).

While not abusing our freedom in Christ, we must nevertheless “stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Galatians 5:1), and look forward to the glorious liberty of the ages to come. HMM

Wednesday, July 5

The King of Glory

“Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory. Selah.” (Psalm 24:10)

In the upper room just before His betrayal, the Lord Jesus prayed to His Father, remembering “the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:5). He had left heaven, however, when “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (1:14). Then, when He miraculously turned water into wine at the wedding in Galilee, He “manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him” (John 2:11).

In the days of His flesh, His glory was veiled, however, except in His life, words of grace and truth, and mighty works. He “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:7-8).

Finally, His glory seemed to be gone forever as He lay in a borrowed tomb. But then “God . . . raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Peter 1:21).

He is now “the Lord of glory” (James 2:1), who, being the very “brightness of [God’s] 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).

As He ascended back to heaven, all His hosts of angels welcomed their Lord of hosts with a mighty anthem of praise: “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory” (Psalm 24:9-10). HMM

Thursday, July 6

Not So, Lord

“But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.” (Acts 10:14)

This response of Peter to the Lord’s command is a self-contradiction. How could He be Peter’s Lord if Peter felt free to disobey His command?

The doctrine and practice of the Lordship of Christ have always been difficult and controversial. Many Christians who have called Him their Savior and Lord nevertheless often feel free to question or disregard His Word. There may be legitimate discussion concerning interpretation of the Word, but there is never justification for questioning its authority, regardless of the pretenses of modern intellectuals or the pressures of public opinion. As the Lord Jesus Christ rebukingly asked, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

There was an earlier occasion when Peter revealed this same inconsistency. When Christ told of His imminent crucifixion, Peter “began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Matthew 16:22). The Lord, therefore, had to rebuke Peter. It was not Peter’s prerogative, nor is it ours, to question the Word of the Lord, even when we don’t yet understand it.

That kind of attitude can, under certain circumstances, have deadly and eternal consequences. Jesus warned those who would profess His Lordship without its reality: “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord. . . . And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:22-23).

Peter learned this lesson and was soon able to confess unreservedly concerning Christ that “he is Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). We who “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” for salvation (Acts 16:31) certainly should seek to believe and obey His Word in all things. HMM

Friday, July 7

Walk—Don't Walk

“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: Who being past feeling have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (Ephesians 4:17-19)

In verses 1-3, Paul encourages believers to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” This humble, patient, loving, peaceful walk contrasts sharply with the walk described in our text.

The walk of those outside Christ is characterized by “the vanity of their mind”—empty, futile thinking. The same word for “vanity” is used elsewhere for those who deny the obvious evidence for creation, who “became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:21-22). They are ignorant and blind, our text says, with darkened understanding and a blind heart. This has led them into a position of alienation from God, dead to any prompting they might receive from within or without. The result of such a mindset is a shameless, reprobate lifestyle, full of lasciviousness, uncleanness, and greediness.

Thankfully, we “have not so learned Christ” (Ephesians 4:20). We are to be “renewed in the spirit of [our] mind” (v. 23) and walk aright. “Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (5:2). “Walk as children of light” (5:8). “Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (5:15), “filled with the Spirit” (5:18). Our Creator promises us an inward “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (4:24). JDM

Saturday, July 8

Careful Ephesus

“Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write;. . . I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars.” (Revelation 2:1-2)

This church, founded by the apostle Paul, had grown in its doctrinal precision and careful attention to the words of Scripture. They were intensely focused on purity of leadership and were vigilant against any form of false teaching. Most of us would find that kind of church a refreshing example to follow in these days of indifferent (and often heretical) theology.

They hated the “deeds of the Nicolaitanes,” which was a horrible practice that the Lord Himself hated (Revelation 2:6). Peter had warned against this domineering attitude in his first general letter to the churches when he insisted that the elders of the churches should not be “lords over God’s heritage, but [be] ensamples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:3).

Ephesus was a “good” church, but the risen Lord Jesus had “somewhat against” them. Apparently, amid all of their careful attention to doctrine and to purity of leadership lifestyle, they had “left [their] first love” (Revelation 2:4). They had fallen from the deep bond of love they had demonstrated years earlier when Paul called the elders to Miletus to encourage and exhort them to remain faithful to “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). They were so much in tune with Paul’s heart for the gospel that they “all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him” (Acts 20:37).

The drift away from that “first love” was so serious that the Lord warned Ephesus to repent or He would take away their “candlestick” (Revelation 2:5)—their authority to represent Christ as one of His churches. Cold, precise doctrine must never take away our love for people or for the truth. HMM III

Sunday, July 9

Faithful Smyrna

“And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; . . . I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer . . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”
(Revelation 2:8-10)

The Lord Jesus recognized this struggling church, which is not mentioned anywhere else in the New Testament, as one of only two churches mentioned in the book of Revelation that did not receive any warning or condemnation.

He saw them very differently than our “church growth” movement might today. Many tend to envy the churches with big auditoriums or grand building programs. Most of the world praises those churches that are “emerging” from the restraints of godliness and churches that are “driven” to attract and please the ungodly.

Smyrna was poor, troubled by those who hated God’s message, and suffered tribulation for their works. Some were thrown into prison for their willingness to be identified with the truth. Generations have passed since anything like that has happened to churches in the Western world. Those countries that persecute Christians today seem only like scattered incidents that have little bearing on the day-to-day life of “civilized” nations. May God protect us from such attitudes.

But the One who walks among the “candlestick” churches of Revelation (His churches) saw Smyrna as rich and worthy of a crown of life. He praised this little church and encouraged them to remain “faithful unto death” (Revelation 2:10). When the King gives out His rewards from the great judgment seat, these faithful, poor, persecuted, troubled, and imprisoned souls will enter eternity with great riches and joyful liberty in the “general assembly and church of the firstborn” (Hebrews 12:23). HMM III

Monday, July 10

Permissive Pergamos

“And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; . . . I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith But I have a few things against thee.” (Revelation 2:12-14)

Retaining a clear identity as a church of the Lord Jesus in an evil environment is worthy of commendation. And indeed, this body of believers at Pergamos held fast to its Christian name—even in a city that was known (at least by God) as the place where Satan had his “seat.” One of their members, Antipas, was killed for his faith. Yet, the church at Pergamos remained faithful with a spiritual testimony, a small light in a sea of wickedness.

But perhaps because of the pressure surrounding them, the Lord warned them that they were allowing two destructive doctrines to flourish among them. The first was compromising with “wages of unrighteousness,” exemplified by Balaam, which had become entrenched among the church (2 Peter 2:15). The second was the “doctrine of the Nicolaitanes,” which their sister church in Ephesus also confronted (Revelation 2:15, 6).

Balaam was a well-known prophet who willingly accepted an assignment with an enemy of God’s people so that he could receive a large sum of money (Numbers 22). And, even though God would not permit Israel to be cursed, as the enemy wanted, Balaam continued to promote his “error,” and Israel lapsed into grave sin (Jude 1:11).

Not much is written in Scripture about the Nicolaitanes. The word basically means “conquer the people.” This early teaching developed into a strong hierarchy of church polity over the next decades, and by the end of the second century, it was well established in the major cities. Jesus taught against such leadership (Matthew 20:26-27) and clearly said that He hated it (Revelation 2:6). HMM III

Tuesday, July 11

Tolerant Thyatira

“And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; . . . I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee.” (Revelation 2:18-20)

The Lord Jesus’ letter to the church at Thyatira is the longest among the seven recorded in Revelation. Although they were faithful in their works to the city, had a strong charity among themselves, and were evidently growing in their reputation and perhaps even in number, the Lord Jesus used some very harsh language to rebuke their behavior.

Whether or not the woman who held influence in the church was actually named Jezebel, she had entrenched herself as a prophetess. Her namesake in the Old Testament (1 Kings) was the wicked queen and wife of King Ahab of Israel during the days of Elijah. Her evil deeds are recorded throughout seven chapters—more than any other woman in Israel’s history!

The Jezebel of Thyatira had been allowed “to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Revelation 2:20). It is not clear if the Lord spoke of physical fornication among the church members, but the practice of sacrificing to idols was a serious rebellion against the second commandment and a clear violation of God’s Word (Exodus 20:4-5).

Those who were committing “adultery with her” (Revelation 2:22) had entered into “the depths of Satan” (Revelation 2:24). Whether this behavior was a physical practice or not (as was common among the pagan religions of the day), it is most certainly identified as spiritual adultery when those who name the name of Christ worship other gods (Jeremiah 3:1, 20; Hosea 9:1; etc.). May God protect us from such horrible leadership. HMM III

Wednesday, July 12

Dead Sardis

“And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.” (Revelation 3:1)

The church at Sardis received the saddest of the Lord’s seven letters in Revelation. Sardis seemed to want to remain known as a “live” church, but the Lord saw their real testimony and reputation and concluded that they were “dead.” Many such places around the world today are enshrined with stained glass, statuary, crosses, and inscriptions that have the “name” of Christianity emblazoned throughout their property, yet they are dead spiritually. Such churches might be compared to the monuments and gravestones erected in cemeteries to honor the memories of faithful men and women of past generations who were alive for a time with a solid reputation for godliness yet whose families have drifted away from the Lord.

Yet, “even in Sardis” there was a small number who had remained faithful in spite of the drift of the church itself, as there are also in families now adrift but with a Christian heritage. The advice to Sardis (and certainly to families as well) is this: “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent” (Revelation 3:3).

The Philippian church received the same counsel: “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Philippians 4:9). The verb is “do.” Heritage is wonderful, but each church—and each of us—will be held accountable for what is actually done. HMM III

Thursday, July 13

Strong Philadelphia

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; . . . I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.” (Revelation 3:7-8)

Philadelphia and Smyrna are the only churches that did not receive warnings from the Lord in the seven letters recorded in Revelation. Philadelphia had “a little strength” because they had built their church on the two foundations of the Word of God and the name of the Lord Jesus.

The foundation of Jesus Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 3:11) and the foundation of the writings of the “apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:20) that are inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16) make the church “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). Philadelphia had faithfully held these eternal principles and was therefore given an “open door.”

The Lord’s introduction to Philadelphia cites the “Key of David,” suggesting a reference to the treasure house of the king (1 Kings 7:51) and to Christ’s authority as the heir to the kingdom (Isaiah 22:22). The treasure of the eternal Kingdom is not physical riches but the gold, silver, and precious stones of God ordained work for the Kingdom (1 Corinthians 3:12-13).

But just as the talents and the pounds granted to the servants in the parables (Matthew 25; Luke 19), the open door is an opportunity to use the resources of the King for His benefit—not a guarantee of success. The Lord grants the resources, but the work and the use of those resources are our responsibility. We will be held accountable.

If we use those resources well, even those of the “synagogue of Satan” will “come and worship” (Revelation 3:9) and “every tongue [will] confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). HMM III

Lukewarm Laodicea

“And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; . . . I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.”
(Revelation 3:14-16)

The Lord Jesus used intense language to rebuke this church, the last of the seven He had John write to in the book of Revelation. Laodicea was dangerously near the brink of being disavowed by He who is the Head of the church.

Such churches believe they “have need of nothing” (Revelation 3:17). Worldly wealth, extensive property, and popular recognition blinded these members and their leaders to their true spiritual condition. They failed to understand that, from the Lord’s perspective, they are “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

The cause of this terrible spiritual destitution is being spiritually tepid. It’s like expecting a glass of cold water or a cup of hot tea but finding everything at room temperature. This church “tasted” just like the world around them. They were neither godly nor in rebellion—just “nice people” who blended in well with the community. Their spiritual reputation did not smell either like life or death (2 Corinthians 2:16).

Despite the Lord’s distaste for such a condition, He loved and counseled them to “buy” from Him the gold of the Kingdom’s true wealth, righteous clothing that would cover their shameful exposure of worldly behavior, and to anoint their spiritual eyes so that they could see eternal values rather than temporal things.

As the Lord graciously closed His letter, He “stands at the door” of the church, waiting for anyone to open and let Him in (Revelation 3:20). Tepid spirituality keeps the Lord outside. What a shame that such could ever be said about any church. HMM III

Saturday, July 15

Guarding the Word

“Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.” (Psalm 119:2)

In the remarkable 119th psalm, there are 176 verses (the longest chapter in the Bible) and 176 references to the written Word of God. Eight different Hebrew words are used for the Scriptures, respectively translated (in the King James Version) “law,” “testimonies,” “precepts,” “statutes,” “commandments,” “judgments,” and two words translated “word” or “words.” Furthermore, this psalm contains 28 admonitions to “keep” the Word, and these are applied to each of the above eight aspects of the Scriptures. The first is in our text, where we are exhorted to keep His testimonies. Note the others also in the following examples.

“Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently” (v. 4); “O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!” (v. 5); “Deal bountifully with thy servant, that I may live, and keep thy word” (Hebrew *dabar*, v. 17).

“Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law” (v. 34); “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments” (v. 60); “I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments” (v. 106); “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word” (Hebrew *imrah*, v. 67).

This means much more than simply obeying His commands, though this is certainly included. Both words translated “keep” or “kept” in the 28 admonitions noted above basically mean “guard” or “preserve,” as in Psalm 41:2, where both words are used: “The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive.”

In these verses and many others throughout the Bible, therefore, we are commanded not merely to obey and proclaim God’s Word, but also to guard, preserve, and defend it against all its many enemies. HMM

Open Doors

“Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds: That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” (Colossians 4:3-4)

This was Paul’s prayer request of the Colossian Christians, that God would open the door for His testimony. Paul had written earlier about “when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 2:12). The purpose of an open door is thus to preach the gospel of Christ and to speak the mystery of Christ.

Furthermore, these passages indicate that such doors are opened by the Lord, not by human devices. In fact, Christ Himself is “he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Revelation 3:7). Doors of testimony are opened by the Lord in answer to prayer, but He also specifies three criteria for keeping the door opened. “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name” (Revelation 3:8).

These conditions mean, literally, having little strength of one’s own and thus depending only on God, jealously guarding the integrity of God’s Word, and upholding the name of Christ as Creator, Savior, and coming King.

Even when the door is kept open by God, there is no assurance of ease in entering it. Paul wrote that “a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9). This is the reason prayer is needed, relying on God, not man!

The Lord is also seeking an open door into churches that think they “have need of nothing. . . . Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him” (Revelation 3:17, 20). HMM

Monday, July 17

The Lord Our Maker

“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker.” (Psalm 95:6)

In the first chapter of Genesis we are told that God was to “make man in our image,” and also that He “created man in his own image” (Genesis 1:26-27). Similarly, on the seventh day God “rested from all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:3).

God is, therefore, both Creator and Maker of all things, including the image of God in man. These two terms are not synonymous, though they sometimes seem to be used interchangeably. “Creation” is calling into existence entities that previously had no existence. No one except God is ever the subject of the verb “create.” The work of making, on the other hand, is that of organizing created entities into complex systems.

It is interesting that God is called “Creator” five times in the Bible, whereas He is called “Maker” 16 times. God created His image in men and women, but He also made them in that image. That is, He called into existence the spiritual component of man’s nature, not shared in any degree by the animals. He also organized the basic material elements into complex human bodies, the most highly organized systems in the universe, and these were made in that image that God Himself would one day assume when He became an incarnate human being. In this way, He is both Creator and Maker of His image in each person.

That image has been marred because of sin, but through the work of Christ we have been “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Colossians 3:10), and our bodies will “be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:21). Created and newly created, made and remade, let us humbly kneel before the Lord, our Maker and Creator. HMM

Tuesday, July 18

No Other Name

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

There are many famous names in the history of religious thought—names such as Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius, Joseph Smith, among a host of others. Each has a multitude of followers who pay homage to his name.

But there is only one name that saves eternally, the Lord Jesus Christ. The words of our text were spoken by the apostle Peter. In his epistle, John also stresses this fact: “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12). The apostle Paul wrote that all those “that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thessalonians 1:8-9).

This exclusivity necessarily results from the fact that there is only one God and Creator of all men, and that all men have rebelled against Him. God Himself has become Redeemer and Savior, dying for the sin of the world and rising again. There can, therefore, be no other Savior than God Himself.

The Lord Jesus repeatedly stressed this truth. “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). “He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). “If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24).

It is urgent, therefore, that anyone desiring forgiveness of sin and eternal salvation come to God through Jesus Christ. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). HMM

Wednesday, July 19

The Word Made Flesh

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

This is the definitive verse on the divine incarnation, when “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19), and the wealth of truth implied therein is beyond human comprehension. We can never understand how the infinite God could become finite man, but where the intellect fails, faith prevails.

It was the Word who “was God” and by whom “all things were made” (John 1:1, 3), yet He made His own human body, in the womb of Mary, and therein “dwelt among us” for 33 years. The Greek word here for “dwelt” is unusual, literally meaning “tabernacled.”

How could this be? “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Timothy 3:16). This is, indeed, a great mystery, “but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). God made a body for Adam; surely He could also make a perfect body in which He Himself could “tabernacle.” He was made “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3) and “was in all points tempted [i.e., tested] like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Since “God cannot be tempted with evil” (James 1:13), and since the Word, who was God, was merely tabernacling in the likeness of sinful flesh, this testing was to demonstrate to man (not to Himself) that He was without sin and therefore able to save sinners. Therefore, John could testify, “We beheld his glory!”

Jesus Christ is, indeed, true man—in fact, He is man as God intended man to be. Yet, neither in the womb of Mary, nor on the cross, did He ever cease to be God. HMM

Thursday, July 20

Together in Christ

“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

This is a wonderful promise. Whether believers come together in church or a home Bible study or even just two together (like husband and wife) to fellowship around the name of the Lord Jesus, He is there also!

The Scriptures often speak of our togetherness with Him and therefore with one another. When we followed Him in baptism, we were “planted together in the likeness of his death” (Romans 6:5). Similarly, when He rose from the dead, God “hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:5-6). One day, we are told, “if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:17).

In our Christian walk right now, we are being “fitly framed together” as a “holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:21-22). We ought, therefore, to be “knit together in love” (Colossians 2:2), “perfectly joined together in the same mind” (1 Corinthians 1:10), and “striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).

Then one day, when Christ returns and the dead in Christ are raised, “we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

So, when we are together with Him through the indwelling Spirit of Christ, whether in a congregation of thousands or just together with one or two Christian companions, we rejoice in His presence, for He is our mighty Creator, our loving Savior, our caring Comforter, our unerring Guide, and our soon-coming King. HMM

Friday, July 21

Searching for God

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33)

These are days when few people seem satisfied. Everyone seems to be searching for something—for riches, power, health, adventure, fame, peace, conquests, or escape. Shamefully, even few Christians seem to realize that the permanent fulfillment or redirection of such desires can only be found in the Lord, the One who created them and designed them to operate in a particular, satisfying way.

While it is true that in an ultimate sense “there is none that seeketh after God” (Romans 3:11) for salvation without the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Christian (and indeed the entire human race) is enjoined again and again to seek God. Note the following passages of encouragement.

“If from thence [i.e., captivity due to disobedience] thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (Deuteronomy 4:29). “If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever” (1 Chronicles 28:9). “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4). “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee” (Psalm 63:1). “I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me” (Proverbs 8:17). “And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

As in our text, our search should be for God and His characteristics. All of man’s desires will either be fulfilled or reoriented as we find Him, and according to the several verses quoted, we will find Him if we truly seek Him. JDM

Saturday, July 22

Praise at the Incarnation

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.” (Luke 1:68-69)

These words of praise, uttered by Zacharias the priest at the birth of John the Baptist, comprise one of seven great doxologies given by men and women in connection with the entrance of the Savior into the human family. Even before this was the testimony of His mother Mary in her Magnificat: “My soul doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour” (vv. 46-47).

But the first was uttered by Elizabeth: “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. . . . And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (vv. 42, 45).

Then, when Christ was born, there were the shepherds who, after seeing Him, “returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them” (2:20). Eight days later, at His circumcision in Jerusalem, the aged prophet Simeon “blessed God, and said . . . mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel” (vv. 28, 30-32). The prophetess Anna “gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (v. 38).

Finally, perhaps two years later, Gentile wise men, after a long journey from the east, “fell down, and worshipped him” (Matthew 2:11). Humble Jewish shepherds and great Gentile scholars joined with priest and prophet and three godly women to praise the Lord for the gift of His Son and to worship Him. Can we do any less? HMM

Sunday, July 23

With Christ

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” (Romans 8:17)

One of the greatest doctrines of the Christian faith is the identification of Christ with His people in all the key events of His great work of salvation. For example, we are considered by God as dying with Him since He died for us. As Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20).

Furthermore, when Christ was buried, we were in effect buried also. “We are buried with him by baptism into death” (Romans 6:4). Then we are also resurrected with Christ. “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

But that is only the beginning of our great salvation. Christ then ascended to heaven, sat down on the right hand of the Father, and we are there with Him! “God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ. . . . And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-6).

Not even is this the end, for we are joint-heirs with Christ, as our text assures us. He has been “appointed heir of all things” (Hebrews 1:2), and we share His inheritance. “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Timothy 2:11-12).

Identified with Christ in His suffering, His death, His burial, His resurrection, His ascension, and then in His eternal reign! This is our position by faith. When He returns, it will become actuality, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). HMM

Monday, July 24

How to Handle a Multitude of Sins

“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.” (Proverbs 10:12)

There is an old familiar cliché to the effect that we should “hate the sin, but love the sinner.” This may sound a bit trite because of overuse, but it is nevertheless both biblical and practical. It is easy and tempting to be critical and condemnatory toward someone who has sinned (especially if the sin has affected us directly), but such an attitude seldom, if ever, produces repentance on the part of the sinner. As the above proverb reminds us, it will more likely generate an angry, defensive response and further strife.

An attitude of loving concern, on the other hand (not of condoning the sin but of personal understanding and sincere interest in the person) will much more likely lead to a genuine change of heart and restoration. Two New Testament writers (Peter and James) cite this Old Testament text in their own advice to Christian believers. Peter says, for example, “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). “Charity,” of course, is the Greek *agape*, which is more often translated “love,” even in the King James Version. The translators used “charity” here, no doubt, because “love” might be, in this context, misunderstood as erotic love, or even brotherly love (different Greek words), whereas “charity” (as an attitude toward others) more nearly describes the *agape* kind of love. Note also that this “charity” is to be fervent charity.

James, like Peter, understands “all sins” in the Proverbs text to imply “a multitude of sins,” and he stresses the true goal in using this kind of love in dealing with a sinner. “Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:20). HMM

Tuesday, July 25

The Serpent in the Wilderness

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live.” (Numbers 21:8)

This might seem an incredible story, but it was confirmed by none other than the Lord Jesus Himself: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).

A plague of poisonous snakes had infested the camp of Israel, sent as a divine judgment because of their complaints and ingratitude, and many people had died. When they confessed their sin and Moses prayed for their deliverance, God in His grace prescribed this unique remedy.

There is, of course, no naturalistic process that can heal a deadly snakebite merely by a look. Neither, of course, is there a naturalistic explanation for the salvation of a sin-poisoned soul merely by looking with faith upon the crucified Son of man. Both are mighty miracles, with the first being beautifully designed by God to be a prophetic foreshadowing of the other.

The symbolism is striking. The brass serpent impaled on the pole represented the poisonous serpents slain, but it also spoke of “that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan,” eventually cast forever into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:2, 10). Thus, it also symbolized the judgment on sin itself and its final banishment from God’s creation.

All of this, however, was only the symbol. The real deliverance required Christ to be made “sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Son of man must be lifted up on the cross, and then all who see Him, and believe, receive life instead of death. HMM

Wednesday, July 26

Descriptive Attributes of God

“And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran.” (Acts 7:2)

There are seven beautiful descriptive attributes of God mentioned in the New Testament. The first was used by Stephen, who called Him “the God of glory” as he gave his defense to the Jewish council just before he was martyred and indeed “saw the glory of God” (Acts 7:2, 55) himself as he finished his testimony.

The apostle Paul later called Him “the God of patience and consolation,” while urging his fellow Christians to be “likeminded one toward another” (Romans 15:5). In the same chapter, he also called Him “the God of hope” in a benedictory prayer: “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing” (Romans 15:13).

To the Christians at Corinth, Paul wrote about “the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). Then later he wrote that “the God of love” would be with them (2 Corinthians 13:11).

To both the Philippians and the Thessalonians, he wrote about “the God of peace” (Philippians 4:9). “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

The seventh of these beautiful descriptions was written by the apostle Peter. “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Peter 5:10).

Recapitulating, in this logical Bible order, these seven beautiful attributes of God (we could almost call them “titles” of God) are as follows: He is the God of glory, the God of patience and consolation, the God of hope, the God of all comfort, the God of love, the God of peace, and the God of all grace! No wonder we can honor and adore Him! HMM

Thursday, July 27

His Son's Name

“Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his Son's name, if thou canst tell?” (Proverbs 30:4)

The obvious answer to these rhetorical questions must center in God, the Creator of all things. But the fascinating revelation in this Old Testament passage is that God has a Son and that both have names.

When Moses asked God His name, “God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM . . . This is my name for ever” (Exodus 3:14-15). Later, Moses, in his song of deliverance, said: “The LORD is a man of war: the LORD is his name” (Exodus 15:3). The name Lord (Hebrew *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*) means, essentially, “I am, the self-existent one.”

As far as His Son's name is concerned, it is revealed in Scripture in many ways. In the Old Testament prophecy, “His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). How remarkable that a “Son is given” who is also named the mighty God and everlasting Father!

In His incarnation, the angel commanded Joseph, “Thou shalt call his name JESUS” (“Jehovah saves”), but he also said, “They shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us” (Matthew 1:21, 23).

There are many other titles by which the Son of God is identified, but perhaps the most significant are noted in connection with His final return in triumph. “His name is called The Word of God” (Revelation 19:13), identifying Him as both eternal Creator and incarnate Savior (John 1:1-3, 14). As our eternal King, “he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Revelation 19:16). HMM

Our Understanding of Creation

“Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee.” (Nehemiah 9:6)

The Bible clearly states that God created the “heaven, and earth, the sea and all that in them is” (Exodus 20:11) out of nothing. “Things which are seen were not made of things which do appear” (Hebrews 11:3). The first verse of the Bible, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” could be paraphrased: God called into existence the space–mass–time (i.e., heavens–earth–beginning) universe. Evidently before creation, nothing now intrinsic to the universe existed at all.

While this teaching is clear, not hard to understand, it is hard to believe. Such *ex nihilo* (i.e., out of nothing) creation is so foreign to our experience that it can only be comprehended as God reveals it to us. We are taught that His creative work was finished at the end of the sixth day of the creation week (Genesis 2:1-4). With the exception of certain of the miracles of Christ on Earth, such creation has not occurred since, and we have difficulty believing it could happen, so foreign is it to our experience.

Our difficulty stems primarily from the fact that we are sinful creatures; our minds are hampered by sin. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Since the doctrine of creation is foundational to the rest of Scripture, we dare not neglect it just because it is difficult, and we dare not impose our feeble naturalistic reasonings onto the clear teaching of Genesis 1 and related passages, thereby reducing God’s power to mere human abilities. JDM

Saturday, July 29

The Ministry of the Saints

“Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their’s and our’s.” (1 Corinthians 1:2)

This salutation to those “called saints” at Corinth (the words “to be” are not in the original) makes it clear that all who “in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” are the saints of God. The word “saint” means “one who is sanctified” or “set apart,” having been called to serve the Lord.

That service is varied, and many striking figures of speech are used in the Bible to describe it. In the first place, the saints are “witnesses unto me” (Acts 1:8) and, therefore, “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20). The words and deeds of believers are to serve as an actual Bible to those who may not read God’s Word. “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 3:3).

Christ applied the figure of candlesticks to the churches addressed in Revelation, with Himself in the midst (Revelation 1:12-13). Similarly, we are enjoined to “shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life” (Philippians 2:15-16). This light is not merely the light of a godly life, but the light of God’s revealed truth, for we constitute “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15).

In relation to Christ, we constitute “the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Corinthians 12:27) and have been presented “as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:2). One day we shall reign with Him as “kings and priests unto God” (Revelation 1:6). HMM

Sunday, July 30

The Word of His Grace

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.” (Acts 20:32)

Many beautiful descriptors are used in the New Testament to illustrate the powers of the Word of God, both spoken and written. For example, the Lord Jesus is called “the Word of life” in 1 John 1:1, and Paul, speaking of the Scriptures, reminded the Philippian Christians that they should be “holding forth the word of life” (Philippians 2:16).

Jesus called the Scriptures, which were to be spread through the world like seed sown in a field, “the word of the kingdom” (Matthew 13:19). The apostle Paul called them “the word of faith, which we preach” (Romans 10:8). Quoting a particular Scripture, he spoke of it as “the word of promise” (Romans 9:9).

As His witnesses and ambassadors, it is to us that He “hath committed . . . the word of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:19), wherewith we are to beseech men to be reconciled to God. Paul also said that “the word of truth” was nothing less than “the gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13).

The writer of Hebrews called it “the word of exhortation” (Hebrews 13:22). In writing through John to the faithful church at Philadelphia, the Lord Jesus commended them because they had “kept the word of my patience” (Revelation 3:10).

But undoubtedly one of the most beautiful and meaningful of such metaphors of God’s Word is the one found in our text (and also in Acts 14:3), that is, “the word of his grace.”

There is no grander theme in the Bible than the unmerited, abundant, inexhaustible, saving grace of God in Christ, and it is fitting that God’s eternal Word be known as “the word of His grace.” The book, in fact, ends on this very note. “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Revelation 22:21). HMM

Monday, July 31

Offended at Him

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.” (Mark 6:3)

There is many an individual who has by God’s grace found the Lord and has had a fruitful ministry in a place far from his hometown where he once lived a lifestyle of which he has now repented. Going home is difficult, for his former companions in sin will be there to oppose and tempt and disbelieve.

In the course of His travels, Jesus returned to His birthplace (v. 1), and although He had lived a sinless life in His early years, He was still only one of the local citizens, and this resulted in their prideful opposition and disbelief.

“And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?” (v. 2). As in our text, His local roots brought scorn and pride and offense.

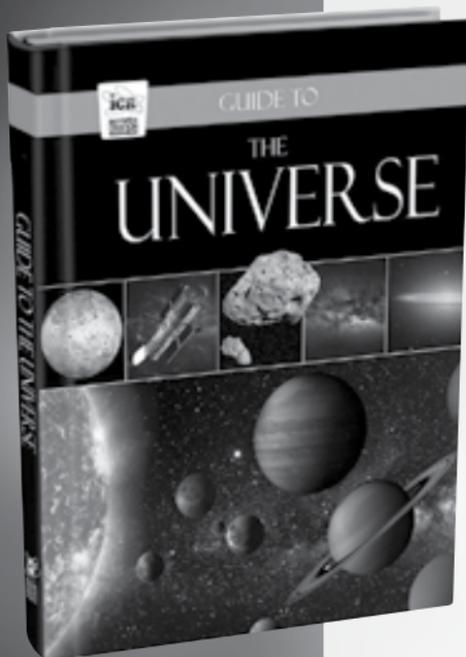
Their unbelief (v. 6) seemed to limit His ability to work miracles (“and he could there do no mighty work,” v. 5), but such is not the case. There is no limit to the power of the omnipotent Creator! He is not limited by our feeble faith, but evidently He chose to limit His work as a way of reproof of their pride and unbelief.

Yet, note Mark’s casual mention of the healing of “a few sick folk” (v. 5). Such healings were in fact a mighty display of God’s power, a fact that Mark’s readers (primarily Romans and other Gentiles very impressed with power) would have recognized.

Let us not allow our modern-day familiarity with Christ and His power limit the honor and obedience that we return to Him (v. 4). JDM

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Tuesday, August 1

Jostling Chariots and Judgment

“The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall justle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings.” (Nahum 2:4)

This strange prophecy, found in the midst of the small book of Nahum, could almost be seen as a description of 21st-century freeway traffic! In context, however, the entire book of Nahum deals with the coming destruction of Assyria and, especially, its great capital, Nineveh. One of the most viciously aggressive and cruel empires in all history, bitterly opposed to God and His rule as Creator in the affairs of men, the Assyrians had been allowed by God to punish the 10 northern tribes of Israel, carrying them into captivity. But their own time of judgment was coming!

Under the preaching of Jonah, Nineveh had experienced a great revival, sparing the city its judgment for over a century. However, it soon became incurably apostate, worse than before, and its most vicious crimes were committed in this later period. Finally, God called Nahum the prophet to announce its coming doom. It was still another century before Nahum’s prophecies were fulfilled, but they were eventually accomplished at the hands of the Chaldeans and the Medes.

There is a possibility that, as is true with many other Old Testament passages, some of Nahum’s prophecies have a near and far fulfillment; the first in the ruin of Nineveh, the second in the great judgments of the last days. Some of the predictions (e.g., Nahum 1:5, 8) seem more appropriate for the end-times, unless they are simply poetic exaggeration, as many think. In any case, whether the jostling chariots fought only in ancient Nineveh or also prefigure lethal attack vehicles of the last days, the burning message of Nahum is that apostasy, violence, and cruelty eventually bring terrible judgment and utter destruction. HMM

Wednesday, August 2

In Heavenly Places

“Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 1:20)

This fascinating phrase (actually, the Greek simply says “in the heavenlies”) is found only in the Ephesian epistle, where it occurs five times. That it does mean heavenly places, rather than “heavenly things,” is evident from our text. Christ in His physical resurrection body is now in a particular place, and that place is where He is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

In principle now—and ultimately in actuality—we also have been made to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (2:6). In the meantime, however, we must also struggle with the demonic powers who still, like Satan, have access to God’s presence to accuse us of sin when we yield to their inducements. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places [actually the same phrase, ‘heavenly places’]” (6:12).

And when, by the grace of God and the indwelling presence of God’s Holy Spirit, we are victorious in this conflict, it becomes a glorious demonstration throughout heaven, to fallen and unfallen angels alike, that Christ’s salvation is genuine and truly works in our lives. All of this is “to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (3:10).

No wonder, with all these glorious events taking place in heaven, the apostle Paul introduces this epistle with a doxology! “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ” (1:3). HMM

Thursday, August 3

Paul's Missionary Journey

“Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” (Ephesians 3:8)

The apostle Paul was undoubtedly the greatest missionary of all time. It is well to take note of his missionary strategy, for it was designed to reach the greatest number with the highest efficiency. In the first place, although he by no means neglected his Jewish countrymen, his calling was to all peoples of the world.

As much as possible, he tried to “preach the gospel in the regions beyond” where it had never gone before (2 Corinthians 10:16), “not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man’s foundation” (Romans 15:20).

He especially concentrated on great cities, particularly the major seaports. He had come from the large city of Tarsus himself, and he preached in the great capital, Rome, and in Athens, the world’s cultural center. Philippi was the “chief city” of Macedonia (Acts 16:12), as was Corinth in Achaia and Ephesus in Asia Minor. Antioch, Troas, Thessalonica—all were great seaport cities. Establishing solid churches in such cities would provide centers for carrying the gospel throughout the world.

In considerable measure, his ministry in these cities seemed to reach people of special ability or opportunity to teach and influence others, such as the philosophers at Athens, the proconsul Sergius Paulus at Paphos, the honorable women of Berea, the school of Tyrannus at Ephesus, and others of like significance.

Most important of all were his writings. Paul wrote half the epistles of the New Testament. He traveled at least 15,000 miles and preached to many thousands of people, but his written words have been read by countless millions over 1,900 years. HMM

The Watchman Held Accountable

“Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: . . . When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning . . . the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand.” (Ezekiel 3:17-18)

Our text comprises part of Ezekiel’s commission as prophet to Judah. His function was compared to a watchman on the city walls whose duty was to warn the city of impending danger. Ezekiel was to warn the apostate people of Jerusalem of the coming invasion by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. God warned Ezekiel that if he refused to pass on whatever messages he received from God, he himself would be held accountable.

On the other hand, Ezekiel was not accountable for the response of the hearer. “Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness . . . he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul” (v. 19). He would also be requested to give similar injunctions and warnings to righteous men who had fallen into sin, but again he was not held accountable for their response (vv. 20-21).

A corresponding teaching is found in the New Testament. “Obey them that have rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account” (Hebrews 13:17). Church leaders, we are told, will give an account before the Lord someday as to how those in their flock have fared. They will not be accountable for the response of others but are required to see to it that each person in their care clearly and lovingly understands the truth and the consequences of disobedience. This is a heavy responsibility!

Let each of us respond properly to the truth as presented by our church leaders, that they may minister with joy and not with grief. JDM

Saturday, August 5

The Lord Jesus Christ

“Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

It is significant that in this first verse of what may have been Paul’s first inspired epistle, he twice identified the Son of God as “the Lord Jesus Christ,” thus giving Him the honor and recognition to which He is entitled.

Paul used this “full name” of Christ at least 19 times in the brief Thessalonian epistles, as he often did in his other epistles. Likewise James called himself “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). Jude warned against any who would deny “the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4). Peter began his first epistle with “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:3). John closed the last book of the Bible with the benediction “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Revelation 22:21).

In the New Testament epistles, He was also frequently called Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, the Lord Jesus, the Lord, or simply Christ. Once He was called “the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:24). It is significant, however, that He was never called merely by His human name “Jesus” except when the writer was referring strictly to His human incarnation. In the gospels, the name Jesus was used very often in relating His words and deeds, but *never* did His followers *address* Him as Jesus. Always when speaking to Him they addressed Him as “Lord” or “Master” (note John 13:13).

Perhaps modern Christians are too careless when they speak or sing of Him or pray to Him using only His human name. As Peter said, “God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). He is now our risen and glorified Lord Jesus Christ! HMM

Sunday, August 6

The Finished Work

“They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.” (Psalm 22:31)

This is the last verse of Psalm 22, the marvelous prophecy that describes so graphically the sufferings of Christ on the cross, a thousand years before the fulfillment. The preceding verse promises that this great event will, literally, “be told about the Lord in every generation.” Fathers would tell it to their children, teachers to their students, generation after generation declaring His righteousness. “One generation shall praise thy works to another, and shall declare thy mighty acts” (Psalm 145:4).

This prophecy has been wonderfully fulfilled for almost 2,000 years as each generation of Christians tells the next generation the old, old story of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Peter 1:11), both of which are graphically foretold here in the 22nd Psalm.

But this final verse especially stresses the fact that the work has been completed. Its last word, “this,” is not in the original Hebrew, so the final statement actually should read “He hath finished!” The most glorious aspect of the gospel message is that He has accomplished all that was needed to assure eternal salvation to every one who would “remember and turn unto the Lord” (Psalm 22:27).

This last great prophecy was fulfilled when He cried out as He was dying on the cross, “It is finished!” (John 19:30). Just as He had, long ago, pronounced that “the heavens and the earth were finished” (Genesis 2:1), completing His great work of creation, so on the cross He had finished the still greater work of redemption. What is left for us to do? Nothing, for He has finished it all! There is nothing we can do, either to create the world or to save our souls. We can only receive, in thanksgiving, what He has done. HMM

Monday, August 7

The True Riches

“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.” (1 Timothy 6:17)

Christians have so many true riches to enjoy that it is sad when many try hard to accumulate the uncertain riches of this world. “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth,” said Jesus (Matthew 6:19).

For example, Paul speaks of “the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering” (Romans 2:4) that have led Him to provide our eternal salvation. For those who have been saved, he writes of “the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory” (9:23). Then, in contemplating the great plan of God for both Jews and Gentiles, he exclaimed, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” (11:33). In Him, in fact, are “hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

When he wrote to the Ephesian Christians, Paul reminded them that Christ had redeemed them through His blood and forgiven their sins “according to the riches of his grace,” in hope that they would understand “the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” He told them that “God, who is rich in mercy,” had saved them in order “that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 1:7, 18; 2:4, 7).

Finally, summarizing all these true riches—mercy, glory, grace, goodness, wisdom, knowledge—Paul spoke of “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8). “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). HMM

Tuesday, August 8

Witnesses of the Resurrection

“Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, . . . Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.” (Acts 1:21-22)

The most important event since creation was the resurrection of Christ, and it was vital that the witness of His chosen apostles focus especially on this great event. They must believe with confidence in His bodily resurrection, having been with Him throughout His ministry, heard His predictions of the resurrection, then seen the infallible proofs thereof, especially the empty tomb and His post-resurrection appearances. Both the original 11 and Matthias, chosen to replace Judas, satisfied these requirements.

Then after the coming of God’s Holy Spirit at Pentecost, “with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection . . . and great grace was upon them all” (4:33). The resurrection proved that Christ was the Creator and Savior, for only the Creator of life could defeat death.

Paul also saw the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and thus he also could be an apostle. “Am I not an apostle? . . . have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” he could say (1 Corinthians 9:1). Only those who had seen the risen Lord and been specifically chosen by Him could be true apostles, for they must be credible witnesses of His resurrection.

And that they were! Peter could say, “We are witnesses of all things which he did . . . whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up” (Acts 10:39-40). And Paul could say, “God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them . . . who are his witnesses” (13:30-31).

Yes, the apostles were true witnesses of Christ’s resurrection, and multitudes have received eternal salvation because they were! HMM

Wednesday, August 9

Abiding Fruit

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.” (John 15:16)

Every true Christian desires to be a fruit-bearing Christian, not one who is “barren” and “unfruitful” (2 Peter 1:8). He or she also earnestly desires that the fruit—whether that of a godly character (Galatians 5:22-23) or that of others won to Christ (Romans 1:13)—will not wither but remain strong and healthy before the Lord.

The promise of Christ in our text is that our fruit will remain, if He has chosen us and we go forth praying in His name and seeking sincerely to bear fruit for His name’s sake. It is significant that the Greek word translated “remain” (that is, *meno*) is also commonly translated “abide,” as well as “continue.” In fact, it occurs no less than 12 times in John 15:4-16, the last being in our text verse above.

To “abide in Christ” does not mean to be continually aware of His presence or perpetually thinking only of Him, but it does mean to continue believing His Word and serving Him. “Continue ye in my love,” He commands (v. 9). To do that, He says that “if ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love” (v. 10).

He also has said, “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed” (John 8:31). “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

Note the progression. He says, “Abide in me, and I in you” (v. 4). This means He says that “my words abide in you,” and also we are to “continue in my love,” which implies that “ye keep my commandments.” It follows, then, that as we “continue” in His Word, we shall “bring forth fruit” that will “remain”! HMM

Thursday, August 10

What Shall We Do?

“Then said they unto him, What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” (John 6:28)

This question is often asked by people who try to work their way into heaven. It was also asked in various ways by men in the New Testament, and it is vitally important to get the correct answer to such questions there and nowhere else.

For example, a rich young ruler once asked Jesus, “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” Jesus answered, “Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:17, 21). That is, there is nothing of his own that one can bring to Christ to earn salvation; one must simply be willing to yield himself fully to Christ.

A lawyer had asked Jesus the same question, “tempting Him.” This time, His answer was, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27). But this standard is humanly unattainable by any child of Adam, so in effect, the lawyer was told it was impossible for him to do anything himself to inherit eternal life.

When the crowd asked Peter on the day of Pentecost, “pricked in their heart” because they had crucified Christ, “What shall we do?” Peter answered, “Repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:37-38). What they had to “do” was an inward act of repentance and faith toward Christ and an outward public testimony demonstrating the reality of that inward change of heart and mind.

Years later at Philippi, a jailer asked Paul the apostle one night, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer was simply, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:30-31). HMM

Friday, August 11

All the Fountains of the Deep

“In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.” (Genesis 7:11)

Our text describes the primary physical causes for the Flood of Noah’s day, as well as the primary sources for the vast waters which covered the earth. The first source is very interesting from a geological point of view, and to grasp some semblance of its meaning is necessary if we would understand the Flood.

As the “deep” in Scripture usually refers to the ocean (i.e., Genesis 1:2), so the “great deep” that was “broken up” evidently speaks of great subterranean reservoirs or chambers deep inside the earth, all of which spewed forth their contents at the same time. This breakup continued all over the earth for 150 days (see Genesis 7:11; 7:24; 8:2).

The reference to “broken up” merits attention, for it implies a wrenching of the earth’s crust, a great tectonic event. The same word is used in Numbers 16:30-33 to describe the supernatural opening up of a great pit into which the rebellious Korah and his followers and their families fell, thereby squelching their mutiny against Moses’ leadership.

Any such breaching of the earth’s crust results in earthquakes, and if occurring under water results in devastating tsunamis (sometimes called tidal waves) traveling through the water at speeds approaching the speed of sound. Continued pulsation of these fountains all over the earth for 150 days would totally restructure the surface of the earth, demonstrating God’s hatred for the sin of the antediluvian world. Coupled with the other factors involved in the Flood, it is no wonder that “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6). JDM

Saturday, August 12

Christians and the World

“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.” (John 17:6)

In the wonderful intercessory prayer of Christ for His disciples just before His death, there are several important references dealing with the relation of the Christian believer to the world around him. In the first place, according to our text, they have been called out of the world and thus are not really a part of its system any more once they belong to Christ.

Yet, they necessarily must still live *in* the world. “These are in the world. . . . I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (vv. 11, 15). They are not of the world, however, for they have been separated *from* the world and unto Christ, whom the world continues to crucify daily. “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (v. 14). Like Christ, they are bound to be hated by the world.

Nevertheless, Christ has sent them into the world as His witnesses. “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world . . . that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. . . . I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me” (vv. 18, 21, 23).

And the most wonderful thing about all these relationships to the world we live in is that God planned them even before He created the world! “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (v. 24). HMM

Sunday, August 13

Position and Condition

*“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”
(Colossians 3:1)*

Christians have a glorious position before God. As our text indicates, God has in effect already “raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6). Yet, our actual spiritual condition here on Earth often seems to belie our exalted position in heaven, so we repeatedly need to be exhorted not only to believe the truth but also to live the truth. Theoretically, we are dead to the world, and our “life is hid with Christ in God,” yet we must continually be exhorted to “mortify [that is, put to death] therefore your members which are upon the earth” (Colossians 3:3, 5). We “have put on the new man” but nevertheless must repeatedly be “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (v. 10).

While in doctrine we are “complete in him,” in practice we must “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation,” yet each believer is commanded to “follow after righteousness” and to “work out your own salvation” (Romans 10:10; 1 Timothy 6:11; Philippians 2:12). We are “all the children of light” (1 Thessalonians 5:5), and we are to “walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). Paul prays that “Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (3:17), yet already we have “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

These truths are not contradictions, of course, but exhortations. “If” (and the Greek word actually means “since”) we are “risen with Christ,” then by all means we ought to live as those that are alive unto God! HMM

A Non-Citizen's Role in Society

*“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.”
(Ephesians 2:19)*

Speaking primarily to new Gentile believers, Paul welcomes them into the body of Christ, made up of all true believers, either Jew or Gentile. Each new member enjoys full privileges and benefits given to all “saints,” those “of the household of God.” “For our conversation [literally ‘citizenship,’ same root word as in our text] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Philippians 3:20).

Regarding our former state, Christ declared: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44). However, we have broken with this former alliance and transferred our allegiance to “God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:18). “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (v. 17).

Our function as non-citizens still living to a degree in our prior realm is revealed, for “God . . . hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation” (v. 18). God is in the business of reconciling others who are now estranged back to Himself, and even though He could do it all Himself, without any help from His feeble creation, He has in His grace given us a part in this blessed work. The work will involve a struggle, for our warfare is against the ruler of this world and his henchmen, but we will, through God’s enablement, be victorious (Ephesians 6:10-18).

“Now then [since] we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God” (2 Corinthians 5:20). Let us be about this blessed business. JDM

Tuesday, August 15

Church Leadership

“The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed.” (1 Peter 5:1)

The leaders of the early churches were critical not only to the ministry of each church but also to its survival. Correspondingly, numerous New Testament passages deal with their qualifications and function. In our text, Peter exhorts these men to proper leadership through service and informs them of a reward waiting for them.

First, we notice that Peter addresses a group of elders, not a single individual in sole authority. No example is given in the New Testament of any church that has grown past infancy that has not incorporated the wisdom of a group of spiritually mature men into its leadership, although there may need to be one who presides among this group.

The primary function of such godly leaders is to “feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof” (v. 2). Note especially that the flock they shepherd is God’s flock among them, not their own flock. A true flock leader takes strong and careful “oversight” but does not usurp ownership.

These leaders are to serve “willingly,” not under “constraint.” Their motive should be “of a ready mind” and “not for filthy lucre,” or financial gain (v. 2). Moreover, these leaders must not be “lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (v. 3). They should lead by serving, thereby establishing a mindset of service in the rest.

Finally, Peter reminds the leaders that faithful, sacrificial service will be rewarded, for “when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (v. 4). May God continue to grant willing, faithful, sacrificial servants to lead each local flock. JDM

Unsearchable and Unspeakable

“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Romans 11:33)

Scientists and philosophers have been able to learn many wonderful things about the universe when they have attempted reverently to think God’s thoughts after Him, but His majesty and purposes are still far beyond human words and understanding—unspeakable and unsearchable. He “doeth great things and unsearchable; marvelous things without number” (Job 5:9).

Not only are His judgments unsearchable and His ways past finding out, but so are His resources. The apostle Paul spoke about “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Ephesians 3:8), and he once had the unique experience of being caught up somehow into the very paradise of God, where he “heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Corinthians 12:4).

We shall learn more, in the ages to come, of “the exceeding riches of his grace” (Ephesians 2:7), as well as the depth of “the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (3:19).

We can have a good measure of peace and joy right now in Christ, but there is much more yet to learn. In the new earth some day we shall really experience “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding” (Philippians 4:7) and be able to “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8).

His great gift of salvation and eternal life we comprehend only faintly now, but we know it is indeed a gift of love and grace and peace and joy! Although we cannot begin to describe it now, we can simply say in gratitude, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Corinthians 9:15). HMM

Thursday, August 17

Now and Then

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12)

There is a great contrast between now and then. We see only dimly now, but at least we see! We only know partially, but we do know! What we shall see and know in the future is already ours, but only in hope and promise. “For what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Romans 8:24).

The Christian life knows many such paradoxes. We now “are the sons of God,” and yet we are “waiting for the adoption” (vv. 14, 23). Us “he also glorified,” but still “we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (vv. 30, 17). Right now in Christ, “we have redemption through his blood,” but the Holy Spirit is “the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Ephesians 1:7, 14). We only have “the firstfruits of the Spirit” while we are awaiting “the redemption of our body” (Romans 8:23), but by “the Holy Spirit of God” we “are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30), and therefore we already possess “redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). Similarly, the Father already “hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (v. 13), but “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

Salvation has past, present, and future dimensions in all its aspects. “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36) as a present possession on the basis of a transaction already accomplished; yet still we must be encouraged to “lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called” (1 Timothy 6:12). We know our Savior by faith, but the day will come when we truly *know* Him as He knows us! HMM

I Charge You

“Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”
(1 Timothy 1:5)

The Greek noun *parangelia* and its corresponding verb *paranello* appear six times in the book of 1 Timothy, translated as either “charge” or “commandment.” Paul was quite concerned for his young disciple Timothy and went to great effort to remind him of the truth and charge him to keep it and encourage its keeping in the lives of those in his care. Let us briefly look at these charges.

First, Paul wanted to *charge* Timothy to remain strong in his personal faith. “This *charge* I commit unto thee . . . that thou . . . mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience” (1:18-19). “I give thee *charge* in the sight of God That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:13-14).

In a similar vein, Paul knew the dangers of false doctrine. “I besought thee . . . that thou mightest *charge* some that they teach no other doctrine” (1:3). Following a discussion of specific false teachings (4:1-10) and their refutations, Paul concludes, “These things *command* and teach” (4:11).

Even those who nominally adhere to proper teaching need direction. “*Charge* them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God” (6:17).

Living up to these charges (*commandments*) brings real benefit in this life as well as in eternity, as we see in our text a pure heart full of *agape* love, a conscience unfettered by sin and false doctrine, and a strong faith not weakened by hypocrisy. If we would be disciples, we should mind the charges given to Timothy. JDM

Saturday, August 19

Unanswered Prayer

“For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” (1 Peter 3:12)

There are many wonderful promises of answered prayer in the Bible, some of which seem both unlimited and unconditional. On the other hand, there are also many warnings of unanswered prayer. This seeming anomaly merely cautions us again that every Scripture must be interpreted in context—both the immediate context and the broader context of all the Scriptures.

For example, Jesus said, “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.” But in the same upper-room discourse, He also said, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 14:14; 15:7). This is a very significant condition, attached to what—out of context—might have seemed an unconditional promise.

Our text indicates that overt sin in one’s life will certainly hinder God in answering our prayers. So will selfish praying: “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3). And so will unbelief: “When ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them” (Mark 11:24). Poor home relations also could be a factor. “Husbands . . . [give] honour unto the wife . . . that your prayers be not hindered” (1 Peter 3:7).

Even when we are confident that we are fully right with God, the desired answer must still be in His will. “If we ask any thing according to his will . . . we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

Finally, there is the question of timing. “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1). Therefore, the believing prayer of a man righteous before God surely will be answered in God’s time and way. HMM

Sunday, August 20

The Cleansing Blood

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

There is a common cultic heresy to the effect that the blood of Christ has no cleansing efficacy of itself, even though this contradicts the plain statement of our text. John wrote the above words long after Christ’s blood had all been spilled on the cross, but it was still miraculously cleansing sinners in His day, and is in ours as well.

It is true that Christ’s blood supported His physical life, for “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11). But His blood was not like the blood of other men, for it was “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19), uncontaminated either by genetic defects due to accumulated generations of mutations (as in all other men and women) or inherent sin.

When His blood was shed, it did not simply disappear into the ground and decay into dust, any more than did His body in the tomb, for it had been an integral part of His perfect human body that was to be raised and glorified. As our great High Priest, He somehow took the atoning blood into the holy place in the heavenly tabernacle. Into the earthly tabernacle “went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people. . . . by his own blood he [Christ] entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Hebrews 9:7, 12).

There in heaven, at the mercy seat, just as the ancient high priest “sprinkled with blood” both the book and the people, the tabernacle and its vessels, so have we been cleansed in God’s sight by His own “blood of sprinkling” (Hebrews 9:19-21; 12:24; see also 1 Peter 1:2). Thus, His blood can (literally) “keep on cleansing us from all sin.” HMM

Monday, August 21

The Offended Brother

“It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.” (Romans 14:21)

Here is a sound biblical principle (not the only one, of course) given to Christians to help them evaluate whether or not to engage in certain practices that are neither explicitly endorsed nor prohibited in Scripture. The question is not whether the practice will hurt the strong Christian who engages in it but whether his example might offend, or mislead, or discourage a weaker brother.

This matter of giving offense is quite serious in God’s sight. “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (1 Corinthians 10:32).

The problem of eating meat purchased from temple markets, after it had been offered in sacrifice to idols, is not an issue for many Christians today, but it was a very real problem to new believers in the first century. The principle given by Paul for deciding *that* issue is still valid for other issues of today (type of clothing, recreational games, smoking, etc.). As Paul expressed it, “Take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. . . . when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend” (1 Corinthians 8:9, 12-13).

On the other side of the coin, the strong Christian should be careful not to take personal offense himself at something done by a fellow believer. “Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them” (Psalm 119:165). The rule for a mature, sincere, concerned Christian is to seek diligently neither to give offense nor take offense on any personal issue, by God’s grace. HMM

Tuesday, August 22

Great Swelling Words

“These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage.” (Jude 1:16)

This picturesque phrase, “great swelling words,” is the King James Version translation of *huperonkos*, which literally means “super-massive,” with the implied noun “words” added because of the context.

The word is used only one other time in the New Testament, in the parallel passage in 2 Peter 2:18: “For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.”

Both apostles, in context, are warning against false teachers who, after somehow obtaining positions of influence among the spiritually immature believers in the body, would then seek to lead them back into worldly ways of thinking and acting. Peter compares those who heed such words to washed sows going back to wallow in the mire (2 Peter 2:22).

Such teachers may appear very intellectual and charismatic, with their “feigned words” (2 Peter 2:3), promises of “liberty” (1 Peter 2:16), and flatteries (see text above), but it is a deadly mistake to follow them. Both Peter and Jude give various ways by which to recognize them. They may actually deny the redemptive work of Christ (2 Peter 2:1) or seek to undermine those whom God has placed in authority (2:10). Perhaps most commonly, they are interested in worldly gain or prestige for themselves (2 Peter 2:14; Jude 1:11). They also may practice and encourage carnal lifestyles (Jude 1:4).

Other characteristics of these deceptive teachers are given in these two key chapters and, by all means, young believers need to be alert to this danger, staying close to God’s Word and obedient to His will. HMM

Wednesday, August 23

The Whole Counsel of God

“For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27)

Evangelical churches have preached the gospel message and have given attention to the return of Christ and our hope of heaven. Sometimes, it is good to step back and look at the “big picture”—the foundational perspective upon which the whole of Scripture is based.

Four foundational passages in the New Testament provide pillars for the whole counsel of God.

John 1:1-14—The Word (our Lord Jesus) was and is God; the Word made everything that was made; the Word was made flesh and dwelt among men.

Romans 11:36—All things are of Him, through Him, and to Him.

Colossians 1:16-20—By Him all heavenly and earthly powers were made; by Him all things are saved from destruction; by Him all things will be reconciled.

2 Peter 3:1-13—He destroyed the first world because of evil; He will destroy this present universe by fire; He will create a new heavens and new earth.

We can lose the reality of the forest because we are looking too closely at each tree. Sometimes it is helpful to back away from the technical aspects of theology or denominational policy and review the “whole counsel”—the overall sovereign purpose of our Creator, Lord, and King.

“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isaiah 46:9-10). HMM III

Thursday, August 24

Knowledge of Eternal Life

“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.”
(1 John 5:13)

It is important that a believer have real assurance of eternal life, and our text indicates that this was John’s very purpose in writing his epistle. It is dangerous, however, to use this verse as a “proof text” apart from the whole context of “these things” that John had written to give such assurance, because the question must be faced as to what constitutes real belief “on the name of the Son of God.” Many professing Christians may well have a superficial assurance of salvation because of a superficial faith.

According to the apostle John, genuine belief in the Son of God can be tested by “these things” that he had written. Space here permits listing only a few of them, but all are important. “Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 2:5). “Ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (2:29). “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren” (3:14). “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (3:24). “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not” (5:18).

Such words of assurance do not require that the believer be sinless (note 1 John 1:8-10), for the Greek tenses imply only that he does not sin habitually. Nevertheless, Christians who are comfortable in a nominal profession of faith, with little outward evidence of that faith, would do well to examine their faith in light of John’s “tests of faith,” whereby we may “know that [we] have eternal life.” HMM

Friday, August 25

So Send I You

“Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.” (John 20:21)

For approximately three years the disciples had followed Jesus in His travels, had listened to His teaching, and participated in His ministry. They had forsaken “all, and followed him” (Luke 5:11). They had seen Him ridiculed, opposed, oppressed, suffer deprivation, and be rejected by the religious leaders of the day, as well as by most of the common folk. They had watched while Judas, a trusted friend, had betrayed Him and then had fled when the Jewish leaders and a Roman guard arrested Him. This beloved leader, for whom they had had such great hopes and in whom they had placed such great trust, had then been scourged, beaten, spit upon, lied about, and nailed to a cruel cross to die in agony and abject loneliness, even abandoned by His loving heavenly Father.

A few days later, the disciples had “assembled for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19), for perhaps the Jewish leaders were trying to stamp out all semblance of His following, and they feared for their own lives now that Jesus was dead. But suddenly, Jesus stood in their midst and showed to them His hands and His side as proof of His death. Yet, He was alive. “Then were the disciples glad” (v. 20).

We are now prepared to fully appreciate the words of our text. It is as if Jesus said, as my Father has sent me, so I send you, and look what they’ve done to me. But even though suffering and hardship will follow, have no fear. My peace and my Holy Spirit will be with you to assure your ultimate victory (compare verses 21-22).

If we would be His disciples, sent out as He was sent out to accomplish His eternal work here on Earth in His physical absence, we must likewise expect persecution, peace, power, and victory. JDM

Justification

“And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation.” (Genesis 7:1)

This is the first mention of the great doctrine of justification in the Bible—that is, being seen as “righteous” by God. The same Hebrew word is translated “just” in Genesis 6:9: “Noah was a just man.” The reason Noah was seen as righteous and therefore as just, or justified before God, was that “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Genesis 6:8). This is the first mention of “grace” in the Bible. The first mention of “faith” or “belief” is also associated with justification: “[Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Thus, in the Old Testament and certainly in the New, justification is by grace through faith. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” and also “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:24; 5:1).

Justification—that is, being seen and proclaimed as perfectly righteous, even in spite of past sins—must of course be authorized by God the Creator. “It is God that justifieth” (Romans 8:33). That God can indeed be both “just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Romans 3:26) is based entirely on the substitutionary death and bodily resurrection of Christ, who conquered death. “Being now justified by his blood,” the Lord Jesus Christ “was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Romans 5:9; 4:25).

Now, although we are freely justified by grace through faith, such justification inevitably generates good works also, for “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). HMM

Sunday, August 27

A Colony of Heaven

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 3:20)

The term “conversation” in this verse is from a Greek word (*politeuma*) used only this once in the New Testament. It is related to the word for “city” (*polis*) and has to do with the proper behavior of a good citizen. Consequently, some translations render the word as “citizenship,” stressing the fact that our true home is not in any earthly city but in heaven.

Since we are now stationed here in a foreign land, as it were, one particularly picturesque rendering calls us “a colony of heaven.” We are pioneering settlers, attempting to establish a beachhead for our homeland in a distant, dangerous country. The Lord Jesus prayed to His Father, “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:18). “Go ye into all the world” was His commission, “and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

A similar figure is used in 2 Corinthians 5:20: “We are ambassadors for Christ.” As such, it is vitally important that our “conversation” (i.e., “lifestyle”) be one that honors the heavenly kingdom and our great King.

Then, when our colonizing efforts succeed and new citizens are added to the heavenly kingdom, they can testify with us: “[The Father] hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:12-13).

As citizens, and colonists, and ambassadors from heaven, we are here only temporarily, of course. Our real home is with our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are looking for Him to establish His eternal kingdom here on Earth as it is in heaven. HMM

Can a Christian Not Sin?

“My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (1 John 2:1)

If the question is asked “Does a Christian not sin?” then the answer is no. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. . . . If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:8, 10). Even the most godly Christian does sin occasionally—in thought if not in deed, in omission if not in commission. The God-given antidote is 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

But there is a danger if we use such verses as an excuse for sinning or for taking sin too lightly. If the question is asked “Can a Christian not sin?” then the answer is yes! God indeed, in Christ, has made every provision necessary for a believer never to commit sin, and we are without any legitimate excuse whenever we do.

This must be so for at least two reasons. In the first place, Jesus Christ in His humanity is our example, and He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). He accomplished this, not because of His deity, but solely in His humanity.

Secondly, God has *commanded* us not to sin, and He would never command us to do the impossible. For every temptation, there is a way of escape (1 Corinthians 10:13), and we have no excuse if we fail to take it. Our only recourse is to repent and confess the sin.

Our text commands us to *sin not!* But then, it also reminds us that Christ is our great advocate before the Father. He is righteous and has already taken our sins away as our propitiatory sacrifice, so “the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). HMM

Tuesday, August 29

The Fourfold Witness to Christ

“One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin, in any sin that he sinneth: at the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established.” (Deuteronomy 19:15)

In the Mosaic law, at least two reliable witnesses were required to convict a man of a crime. Jesus Christ was charged with blasphemy, claiming to be the unique Son of God. Not only was there the required double witness, but actually a fourfold witness to the “crime.” The witnesses not only agreed that the claim was made but also that the claim was true!

The first was John the Baptist, who said, “I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34). To so testify was John’s very reason for being, for he “was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light” (John 1:8-9).

There was also a second, more potent witness. “I have greater witness than that of John,” Jesus said, “for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me” (John 5:36). The great teacher Nicodemus had to acknowledge, “No man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2).

Furthermore, there was the direct testimony of God from heaven. “The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me” (John 5:37). “There came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (2 Peter 1:17).

Most importantly, there is the testimony of the Bible. “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39).

We no longer have such direct testimony, but we will always have the Holy Scriptures, eternally proclaiming the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. HMM

U.S.E. Your Faith

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Romans 1:17)

Today’s verse contains a portion of Habakkuk 2:4, emphasizing that those who have been twice-born can live using the same faith that God granted us so that we could believe (Ephesians 2:8). An acronym for USE can help focus our thoughts.

U—Use what you have. Moses had only a rod when God called him to deliver the nation of Israel (Exodus 4:2-6). We should use the talent and equipment already in our possession, just like the widow of Zarephath, who gave her meager grain (1 Kings 17:10-16). Daniel used his secular position (Daniel 6:14-23), and Esther used her beauty and bravery (Esther 4:13-17) to accomplish His will.

S—Start doing it. Nothing happens unless we become involved. The priests of Israel participated in the miracle at Jordan when they obeyed and stepped in the river (Joshua 3:5-17). The widow did not reap the bounty until she followed Elisha’s instructions and borrowed pots from her neighbors (2 Kings 4:1-7). After the miracle of the oil, she surely wished that she had not limited God’s supply. The man who was born blind had to wash as instructed before he could see (John 9:1-7). And those at Lazarus’ tomb had to open it before they could see him resurrected (John 11:39). God instructs, we obey, and He performs.

E—Expect it to happen. The centurion understood our Lord’s authority when he asked Him to heal his servant (Matthew 8:5-13). The Syrophonecian woman insisted on being healed (Matthew 15:21-26), and the nobleman went home confident that his son had been saved (John 4:46-53).

Circumstances will vary, but God’s “formula” does not.
HMM III

Thursday, August 31

God's Grace

“Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

Although Christ has set the believer free from legalistic bondage, he is now under a still higher law—the law of Christ. It is also called “the law of the Spirit of life” that has made us “free from the law of sin and death” (Romans 8:2).

The law of Christ does not consist of many detailed ordinances that we are duty bound to obey. It is a law that we want to obey out of love for Christ. “Therefore love is the fulfilling of the law” (Romans 13:10). Paul says that “the end of the commandment is charity [that is, Christian love] out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Timothy 1:5). James calls it “the royal law,” defining it simply as “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” (James 2:8).

Instead of a law bringing us into bondage, it is “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25), setting us free from slavery to sin. It not only gives us the desire to please the Lord but also the will and the ability to do so.

It is not as though we are now without law and thereby free to indulge our carnal appetites. Paul explains his own new nature thus: “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more . . . (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ)” (1 Corinthians 9:19, 21).

In Christ, “the righteousness of God without the law is manifested,” and He is “the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Romans 3:21; 10:4). But though we “have been called unto liberty,” Paul commands us to “use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another” (Galatians 5:13). Thus, to believe in Christ is also to obey Him. HMM



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