

Days of
Praise

June • July • August 2018

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

June • July • August 2018

*“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.”
(John 15:16)*

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” (2 Corinthians 10:4)

Dear Christian friend,

Once again it is our privilege and joy to share with you some of the short studies in God’s Word that have blessed our own hearts as we prepared them. Our prayer is that you will find encouragement in some, challenge in others, and delight in all.

Many of them were written over the past decades by ICR founder Dr. Henry Morris. Some are by Dr. John Morris, ICR’s former president, and a few by myself. As you read each day’s study, we ask that you remember ICR in your prayers. As the apostle Paul once noted, “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Corinthians 16:9). The ICR Discovery Center for Science and Earth History is quickly entering the final stages. Pray with us that this new ministry affirming the accuracy and authority of God’s marvelous Word will reach many thousands.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Henry M. Morris III, Chief Executive Officer

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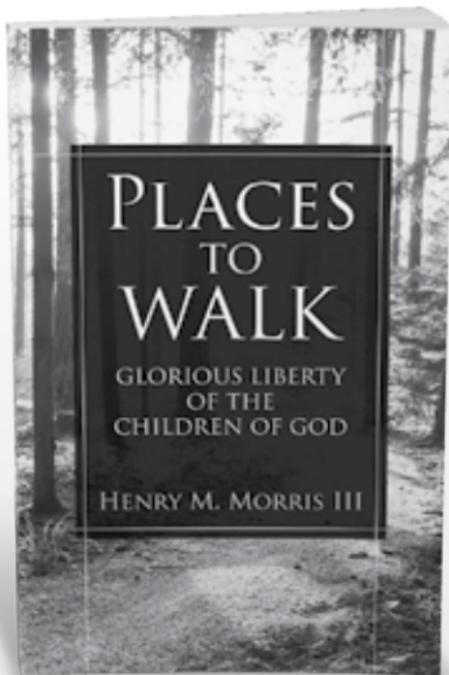
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Some entries are taken from *Places to Walk* by Henry M. Morris III.

PLACES TO WALK

HENRY M. MORRIS III



*In *Places to Walk: Glorious Liberty of the Children of God*, Dr. Henry M. Morris III covers some of the highlights that describe what it means to be a twice-born child of God. At the most basic of biblical foundations, a Christian has been identified by the Creator as one He desires to spend eternity with!*

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Friday, June 1

Places to Walk

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by.” (Zechariah 3:7)

In one vision given to Zechariah, Joshua the high priest is shown standing before the awesome throne in heaven. He is pictured as being clothed in filthy garments next to the angel who brought him. Satan was there with all his power, trying to resist everything Joshua was doing. Of course, the Lord was there too and rebuked Satan, calling Joshua “a brand plucked out of the fire” (Zechariah 3:2).

What follows in the vision is a beautiful picture of what God does for us when we are twice-born. The Lord commands the angels to “take away the filthy garments” because, He says, “I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.” The attendants quickly “set a fair mitre upon his head, and clothed him with garments” (Zechariah 3:4-5).

When we are created by God as a “new man” while down here on Earth, the spirit is changed, along with a new heart and a new mind, but one day we will be clothed in fine linen that represents the righteousness of the saints (Revelation 19:8)—all given to us when we were made righteous by the marvelous grace of our Lord Jesus.

What Zechariah is shown about the Joshua of old is the vast promises of a close working relationship with the Creator Himself—judging His house, having charge of His courts, and being given “places to walk” among the great personages of the courts of heaven. This is a picture of what it means to be a twice-born child of God. At the most basic of biblical foundations, a Christian has been identified by the Creator as one He desires to spend eternity with! HMM III

Saturday, June 2

Your Past Condition

“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins.” (Ephesians 2:1)

Three concise descriptions are given in Scripture of how God sees all sinners prior to the creation of the second birth in us.

- We were dead in trespasses (activities) and sins (character, attitude, condition). The result was that we were unable to understand or seek God on our own (Romans 3:10-11). Nor are we able to know the things of God by our own intellectual prowess (1 Corinthians 2:14).
- We “walked according to the course of this world” (Ephesians 2:2), in bondage to the world (Galatians 4:3) and blinded by Satan (2 Corinthians 4:3-4).
- We are by “nature the children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3). Both our natural desires (Ephesians 5:5-6) and our willing unbelief (John 3:36) put us under an ever-increasing wrathful judgment of God (Romans 2:5-9).

The transformation performed by God on us can only be “his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:10). It involves God’s rich mercy and great love (Ephesians 2:4) to make us alive when we were dead (see John 5:21-24; Romans 6:4-6, 9-11). That power raises and seats us with God in the heavens (Ephesians 2:6). That grace is effected through faith, and even “that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Whatever being twice-born may ultimately involve, it assures us of permanent status as the chosen, holy ones of God (Romans 8:29-39), “that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). HMM III

Sunday, June 3

Your Present Identity

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

Prior to salvation, we are called “aliens . . . and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). But now we are a “new man” and part of the grand partnership that has been made possible between Jew and Gentile, old and new covenant saints, and the operative impact and purpose of the “household of God” (Ephesians 2:13, 19).

We are brought near and made one. The enemy has been abolished, with the “middle wall of partition” that was between us broken down (Ephesians 2:13-15), making us “one body” with common “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Ephesians 2:16-18).

Therefore, we are “fellowcitizens . . . of the household of God” (see 1 Timothy 3:15), built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, “fitly framed together,” growing into a holy temple “for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22), now displayed in a fellowship of past and present, bond and free, male and female, all new “partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Galatians 3:22-29; Ephesians 3:1-6).

Notice that “now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:10). This enormous impact is “according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:11).

God has designed His salvation for you in such a way that you cannot fail to achieve His plans for you! You should humbly thank Him for what He has accomplished in you through Jesus Christ. HMM III

Your New Position

“He hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” (Ephesians 1:4)

The search for identity and meaning can drive one to great successes or tragic failures. However, for the Christian the question is answered through the Scriptures.

Chosen: You are selected as a favorite out of “many [who] are called” (Matthew 22:14) “out of the world” (John 15:19). What a privilege! You are God’s choice to bear His name, represent His cause, and share His glory throughout eternity. In fact, you are “predestinated [previous boundaries set] . . . unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself” (Ephesians 1:5). And “if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

Accepted: Furthermore, you are “accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). That word “accepted” is a specialized form of the word most often translated “grace.” You are “graced” by almighty God, who set absolute boundaries around your life and made you His child. You are purchased “through his blood” (Ephesians 1:7) “that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar [precious] people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

Forgiven: Moreover, you are forgiven (Ephesians 1:7)! Your sins are covered (Psalm 32:1), cast behind God’s back (Isaiah 38:17), removed “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12), remembered no more (Jeremiah 31:34), as He has “cleans[e]d us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

If you are God’s child, you should have no identity crises. You are a chosen, predestined, accepted, redeemed, and forgiven holy one, predestined “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). HMM III

Tuesday, June 5

Your New Nature

“. . . that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.” (Ephesians 1:4)

In the grand purpose of our selection into God’s family, two key words are used.

Holy: The word “holy” (Greek *hagios*) is the most frequently used descriptor about God’s twice-born. It stresses dedication. A holy man or woman is distinctively God’s, set apart for God’s use, separated from the secular, and consecrated to God’s service. All who are chosen are to be holy. The Colossians Christians were told to mortify the physical appetite, put off the sinful mental attitudes and habits, and “put on the new man . . . as the elect of God, holy and beloved” (Colossians 3:10-12). The focus is character.

Without Blame: “Without blame” refers to our reputation. This will only be finally realized in heaven (1 Corinthians 1:8), but there is a present responsibility to “present your bodies a living sacrifice And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:1-2). The character of holiness is the cause for a lifestyle of blamelessness. We are to be the “sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15).

This holy and blameless condition will result in “the praise of the glory of his grace” (Ephesians 1:6), where God will “gather together in one all things in Christ” (Ephesians 1:10). What a magnificent thought! The purpose for which we have been chosen, predestined, redeemed, and forgiven is to be holy in character and blameless in reputation so that when God gathers us all together in Christ, we will be the praise of the glorious grace of God! HMM III

Wednesday, June 6

Your New Purpose

*“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”
(Ephesians 4:1)*

We are called “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Our calling is identified as heavenly (Hebrews 3:1) and upward (Philippians 3:14), and we are told that “the called” (Romans 1:6) are called “according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). But we are also told to “give diligence to make [our] calling and election sure” (2 Peter 1:10). There is much in Scripture about our calling, and although the calling is God’s work and prerogative, we are expected to “add to [our] faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Peter 1:5-7).

We are “called to be saints” (Romans 1:7). That is, the purpose for which we have been invited by God to become one of His chosen is to be holy! Everything in our lifestyle should center on the fact that “we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). Other aspects of our calling are the results of that holy character that should be the ever-controlling dominant factor in our lives.

The specifically cited traits in this context are attitudes of lowliness (see Philippians 2:1-3) and meekness (see Colossians 3:12-17), all the while “endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3). A summary of this calling is found in Paul’s closing comment to the Corinthian church: “Be perfect [complete], be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Corinthians 13:11). HMM III

Thursday, June 7

Your New Authority

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” (Matthew 28:18-19)

Israel’s high priest wore the inscription “Holiness to the LORD” to illustrate to all who obeyed God that they were “accepted before the LORD” (Exodus 28:36-38). High priest Joshua, as a type of all believers, was granted “places to walk” in the courts of God (Zechariah 3:7). Christ’s disciples were commanded to ask the Father for whatsoever since they were chosen and ordained to “go and bring forth fruit” (John 15:16). We can “ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7).

But there’s more! Not only are we accepted, we are “sealed with that holy Spirit of promise” (Ephesians 1:13). We are “stablish[ed] . . . anointed . . . sealed” (2 Corinthians 1:21-22). We are confirmed in everything (1 Corinthians 1:4-8), consecrated and sanctified to serve (1 John 2:27), and given the Spirit as an “earnest [down payment, deposit] of our inheritance” (Ephesians 1:14).

The Holy Spirit does His work through a threefold ministry in our lives. He will work on Christ’s behalf, through our witness, to bring conviction to those not yet in Christ (John 16:7-11). He will also minister to us as the teacher of our spirit to guide us into all truth (John 14:17, 26; 15:26; 16:13). Furthermore, the wisdom, prudence, and knowledge of God are revealed to us through His work in us (1 Corinthians 2:9-10). All that is necessary for our “effectual working” (Ephesians 3:7) is graced to us so that we can “work out [our] own salvation” (Philippians 2:12). We are “complete in him” (Colossians 2:10). HMM III

Your New Capabilities

“. . . that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.” (Ephesians 1:17-18)

The “spirit of wisdom” is applied to a wide variety of circumstances. It certainly includes leadership (Deuteronomy 34:9). But wisdom is also identified with the ability to make beautiful clothing (Exodus 28:3) and to engineer and invent complex equipment (Exodus 31:2-6). Daniel was said to have “an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts” (Daniel 5:12). We are even promised to be given wisdom that our “adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luke 21:15).

A “spirit of revelation” is also made available to us. This revelation (literally “to take off the cover”) is not new doctrine or truth. Revelation is implemented by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10), having the source of His revelatory work from Jesus Christ on behalf of Christ (John 16:13-15).

The Greek language of the phrase “the eyes of [our] understanding being enlightened” (Ephesians 1:18) could be translated “the vision of your deep thought will be made to shine,” or paraphrased in a more colloquial expression “the light comes on!” There are three specific enlightenments cited.

- The hope of our calling (Romans 15:13-14)
- The riches of the glory of our inheritance (Romans 11:33-36)
- The exceeding greatness of His power exercised on our behalf (Ephesians 3:20; 6:10)

Each of those are specifically designed by God to undergird our faith and embolden our confidence, even though we are “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Hebrews 11:13). HMM III

Saturday, June 9

Your New Expectations

“This I say . . . that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk.” (Ephesians 4:17)

This succinct command is quickly followed by a sweeping description of the impotent mind of the Gentiles in contrast to the utterly changed condition of the believer. The Gentiles have a darkened perceptive ability, rendering them alienated because of the “ignorance that is in them” and an overall “blindness of their heart” that is the root cause of their inability to function, even to feel, in the same way as the children of God (Ephesians 4:18-19; compare Romans 1:21-32 and 2 Corinthians 4:3-4).

However, the saint of God is told to discard the “old man” and to “put on the new man” (Ephesians 4:20-24)—as though that simple picture of a powerful reality is adequate instruction to fulfill the earlier command. No longer is the child of God to be “corrupt” by the “deceitful lusts” of their old condition, but having “learned Christ” and “been taught by him,” the saint is to “be renewed in the spirit of [their] mind.” A transformation is now possible through the new mental (intellectual, spiritual) abilities given to us by Christ (Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 2:16).

We are responsible to wear the new man like a body-enveloping cloak, created for us by the omniscient Creator “in righteousness and true holiness.” Don’t miss this! We have been given a specially created new man to wear (externally visible) that will show (exhibit, demonstrate, make clear) the spiritual difference between the Gentiles and the saints of God.

The 17 commands that follow in Ephesians 4:25–5:7 address every aspect of the Christian walk, all relating to a lifestyle of truth, giving specific contrast between the Gentile and the saint. HMM III

Sunday, June 10

The Lamb's Book of Life

“And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.”
(Revelation 21:27)

God does keep books! In fact, when David was pondering the time between his own conception and birth, he said “in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance [that is, as my days continued] were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them” (Psalm 139:16). It seems that God has a book for each person who is conceived, and that all these together constitute the Book of Life, one great volume containing the names and deeds of every one who was ever given biological life by his Maker.

But many, during the course of their lives, will reject (or simply ignore) God's provision that would also give them *eternal* life. As David prayed in another psalm: “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous” (Psalm 69:28). Note also Revelation 3:5 and 22:19. And that will be a fearful thing, for “whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

Those whose names will *not* be blotted out of the book, of course, are those who have been redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:19). Not one person *deserves* to be retained in God's book, for all have sinned, but they have “beheld,” with eyes of thankful faith, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and have therefore been redeemed by the Lamb.

Finally, only these will still have their names written on the rolls of the heavenly city. God's Book of Life will have become “the Lamb's Book of Life” on which are written forever the names of all those redeemed by His blood. HMM

Monday, June 11

Ye Which Are Spiritual

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1)

According to the New Testament, there are two broad categories of Christian believers, carnal and spiritual—that is, those whose actions and decisions are mainly governed by the “flesh” and those who normally are governed by the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul noted this fact when he wrote to the bickering Christians in the church at Corinth. “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:1).

Even though true believers can behave carnally, the fact that they are “babes in Christ” confirms that they are “*in Christ*.” They just need to grow up, as it were, into spiritual maturity through partaking of both the milk *and* the meat of the Scriptures. Note 1 Peter 2:2 (“desire the sincere milk of the word”) and Hebrews 5:14 (“strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age”) for the God-given principle of Christian growth.

But our text also has a warning for *spiritual* Christians! When confronted with the fact of a “fault” (that is, literally, a willful sin) in the life of a Christian brother, we must remember that our own spirituality does not guarantee that we ourselves are immune from sin. We must be careful to help rather than to condemn such a weak brother because we still can “also be tempted,” even though we usually try diligently to obey God’s Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

It is vital, the apostle reminds us, that “ye which are spiritual” maintain a true “spirit of meekness” in our interactions with fellow believers, as well as with the unsaved. HMM

Yet Not I

“But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” (1 Corinthians 15:10)

The apostle Paul was, by any measure, one of the most dedicated and fruitful Christians who ever lived. If any man had a right to be proud of his writings, or his works, or his life in general, it was Paul. No doubt he, like others, had to wrestle with the sin of pride, reminding himself again and again that all he had done he owed simply to the grace and guidance and provision of God.

He could well have boasted, as noted in our text, that he had labored more abundantly than any of the other apostles, but then he brought himself up short with the remonstrance: “*Yet not I!*” All of his work and success therein he owed completely to the grace of God.

This phrase occurs just two other times. The first is when Paul is giving out his advice and wisdom concerning that most basic of all human institutions, marriage. “And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband” (1 Corinthians 7:10). As wise (and even divinely inspired) as his words may have been, he must remind his readers that, after all, this was Christ’s command, not his!

The last occurrence is in Paul’s great testimony concerning his new and changed life in Christ. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). The transformed, holy, powerful life he was living was not his own accomplishment, but due solely to the indwelling Christ. And surely, if Paul must so remind himself and his listeners, then we should never boast of our own life or works or words. Not I, but Christ—that is to be our testimony! HMM

Wednesday, June 13

Love, Faith, Joy

“Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:8-9)

Peter had seen the Lord, but he was writing to those who hadn't, including us. Like them, we can have a personal relationship with the Lord, even though we haven't physically seen Him. “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29). Also like them, we can have terrible trials (1 Peter 1:7). Their responses to Christ while in the midst of trials, as given in our text, are likewise appropriate for us.

They loved Him: Love many times makes a trial bearable. “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” (Romans 8:35). He loves us too much to abandon us, and we love Him in return.

They believed: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth [or believes] in thee” (Isaiah 26:3). “Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters” (Jeremiah 17:7-8). Our faith is well founded.

They rejoiced: “But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Peter 4:13). The proper response to trials brings inexpressible joy. The end of such faith as explained in our text is the complete and ultimate salvation of our souls, with many victories of faith along the way. JDM

Thursday, June 14

The Opened Prison

“The Spirit of the LORD God is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” (Isaiah 61:1)

The Lord Jesus appropriated this beautiful verse of the prophet Isaiah to Himself, preaching from it one day in the Nazareth synagogue and proclaiming: “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). Note that He came to preach the gospel to the meek, not the arrogant, and to bind up the brokenhearted, not the hardhearted.

He also came to set the captives free. This was not, however, to deliver the Jews from Roman bondage as many had hoped, but a far greater deliverance. In the Hebrew, the phrase “opening of the prison” is only one word (a doubled word), and it occurs only this one time in the Old Testament. When Christ quoted it in the synagogue, He actually expanded and interpreted it as follows: “recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18).

The “prison” that Christ came to open is evidently a spiritual prison, a binding of the soul, a blinding of the mind. “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36)—free from the bondage of sin, translated “out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

There was also another prison, a very real prison, deep in the heart of the earth to which He came. While His body slept in the tomb, His spirit descended into Hades where the spirits of all who had died in faith were awaiting Him, and “when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and . . . ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things” (Ephesians 4:8, 10). HMM

Friday, June 15

Asking in Jesus' Name

“And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” (John 14:13)

In the gospel of John there are at least six promises that if we pray in Jesus' name, God in Christ will answer our prayer. The first is in our text, which promises that God the Father may be glorified in God the Son. Note also the equivalent promises in John 14:14; 15:16; 16:23-24, 26.

Such promises seem almost too comprehensive and unconditional to be understood literally. The key, however, is the significance of the phrase “in my name.” This obviously means more than simply beginning or ending our prayer with this or some similar phrase.

In the first place, we must recognize that it is only through Jesus Christ our mediator that we dare enter the presence of the omnipotent God at all. “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6), He said. That being true, it also implies that our prayer must be in agreement with what Christ Himself would pray. No Christian should ask for something he knows to be against God's will. “If we ask any thing according to his will . . . we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

When we come to the Father in Christ's name, we are in a very real sense representing Him. Therefore, we must come with clean hands and motives worthy of the One in whose name we profess to come. Unconfessed, unrepented sin would surely misrepresent Him, and we could hardly speak in His name in such a case. Finally, acknowledging His power and promise, we must come believing, not doubting His Word.

Then, not only is the Father glorified, as says our text, but we shall rejoice. “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. . . . ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23-24). HMM

Saturday, June 16

The Proof of Obedience

“And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.” (1 John 2:3)

Jesus once said, “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). Poignant question. A familiar complaint of those who despise Christian teaching is that “Christians” don’t act like Christians! It is a sad commentary on the condition of the Lord’s family when the ungodly are more aware of the expected behavior of God’s people than the Christians are.

Of course, the issue is not unique to the New Testament times. Israel’s historical saga is replete with seasons of rebellion and repentance—so much so that the psalmist prayed: “That the generation to come . . . might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God” (Psalm 78:6-8).

The emphasis by John in his first epistle, however, is not on the reasons for willful disobedience, but on the results of willing obedience.

- Walking in the “light” ensures fellowship (1 John 1:7).
- Constant and willing obedience produces an effective prayer life (1 John 3:22).
- A lifestyle of obedience brings an awareness of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling (1 John 3:24).
- Loving God produces obedience, which in turn brings joy in that obedience (1 John 5:3).

Our deeds *show* whom we serve (1 John 3:7). Our righteous deeds *prove* whom we serve (Matthew 7:16-20). HMM III

Sunday, June 17

Honoring Our Fathers

“Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.”
(Exodus 20:12)

This familiar command was the fifth in God’s list of Ten Commandments, the law of God, and it has never been abrogated. It was quoted by Christ as His own command, when He said: “If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. . . . Honour thy father and thy mother” (Matthew 19:17, 19). The apostle Paul also cited it as of special significance: “Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise” (Ephesians 6:2).

This all indicates that God considers the honoring of parents by their children to be of great significance. Since the father has been charged with the primary spiritual responsibility for his family, it is of supreme importance that fathers lead their children properly and the children follow that lead with all due respect and diligence. God blessed Abraham as “the father of us all” (Romans 4:16) because He could say concerning Abraham: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment” (Genesis 18:19).

It is not easy being such a father, but it is vital if our children are to come also to honor their heavenly Father. “For what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? . . . 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 12:7, 9).

“And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). If we fathers diligently follow God’s Word in leading our children, then they will honor their fathers, not only while they are children, but all their lives. HMM

Coming Like the Flood

“So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him.” (Isaiah 59:19)

The great enemy of our souls “the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). Yet he can also be “transformed into an angel of light,” and so can “his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). He and his ministers are perhaps most dangerous when most deceptive, quoting Scripture and spiritual sentiments in a superficial show of piety, yet distorting the “Scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:16), and we must use the sword of the Spirit against them.

Then there are those times when, angered that their deceptions (sometimes even their own self-deceptions) are not persuading the true people of God to compromise their stand for God’s truth and His great salvation, they resort to great pressure and overt opposition—even persecution—seeking to silence their testimony. The enemy comes in like a great flood, and the waves seem about to engulf us, and we cry with the psalmist: “If it had not been the LORD who was on our side, when men rose up against us: Then they had swallowed us up quick, when their wrath was kindled against us: Then the waters had overwhelmed us, the stream had gone over our soul” (Psalm 124:2-4).

But God is on our side, as long as we are on His side and hold fast to His clearly revealed Word. Before the demonic flood can overwhelm us, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up His standard (or, more literally, “put him to flight”), and God will prevail once again, for “the foundation of God standeth sure” (2 Timothy 2:19), and “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). HMM

Tuesday, June 19

What to Put On

“And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” (Luke 24:49)

People give much attention to what material clothes they should put on, but the New Testament tells us what spiritual clothes to put on. First, we are to be “endued with” power from on high. This Greek word (*enduo*) is normally rendered “put on.” That is, we are to put on power, and this is imparted only by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), according to Christ’s departing promise.

“Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. . . . put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:12, 14). “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27).

Along with this, we are to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man,” and then to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22, 24). Then we must “put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11).

These items of spiritual clothing—the power of the Holy Spirit, the light of God’s presence, the new man in Christ, the resurrection life of the indwelling Christ, His imputed righteousness and holiness and all our spiritual armor—provide the foundation clothing for beautiful spiritual jewels and accessories. “Ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: . . . Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; . . . And above all these things put on charity [love]” (Colossians 3:9-10, 12, 14). HMM

Things We Ought to Do

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.” (Matthew 23:23)

This sharp rebuke by Jesus to the legalists of His day should also be taken seriously by us today. Although we are saved by grace alone, there are many things we *ought* to do, not as a matter of credit *toward* salvation, but as gratitude *for* our salvation. Surely judgment, mercy, and faithfulness are high on such a list.

Other “oughts” of the born-again Christian life would include the following incomplete listing:

1. *Prayer*: “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).
2. *Obedience to God as Priority*: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).
3. *Working and Sharing*: “So labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).
4. *Gracious in Speech*: “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Colossians 4:6).
5. *Walking with God*: “As ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” (1 Thessalonians 4:1).
6. *Heeding God’s Word*: “We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip” (Hebrews 2:1).
7. *Sanctified Behavior*: “What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness” (2 Peter 3:11).

Thursday, June 21

He That Is Spiritual

“But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.” (1 Corinthians 2:15)

The word rendered “spiritual” is the Greek word *pneumatikos*, from which theologians have coined the term “pneumatology,” the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Thus, a “spiritual” person is one who is not only born again spiritually through faith in Christ and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, but also tries diligently to follow the leading of the indwelling Spirit and to understand and obey the precepts of the Bible inspired by Him.

A spiritual person will have “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16), able to judge all things by spiritual standards and biblical revelation. He or she will “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” knowing that “to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Romans 8:4, 6). As such, spiritual believers prayerfully make decisions seeking God’s will; they are “led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14). And since they “walk in the Spirit,” they “shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

They will often and repeatedly be “filled with the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18) for Christian service. Furthermore, they will manifest “the fruit of the Spirit” in their lives and personalities—that is, “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23).

Yet while “he that is spiritual” is thereby able to discern and evaluate all things by such divine standards, he will find himself often misunderstood by unsaved relatives and acquaintances, for “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: . . . because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

Nevertheless, “he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:8). HMM

In a Moment

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”
(1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

This is one of the greatest promises in the Bible, assuring us that “we” (i.e., all believers, whether dead or living when Christ returns) shall suddenly be changed, with our dead or dying bodies instantly transformed into incorruptible, immortal bodies, which can never die again.

This great change, when it finally occurs, will take place “in a moment.” The Greek here is *en atomo*, “in an atom of time.” This word, implying the smallest entity conceivable by the Greeks, is used only this one time in the New Testament. It is further described by “the twinkling of an eye,” where “twinkling” is the Greek *rhipe*, also used only this once. Evidently there is nothing else in this present world comparable in rapidity to this miraculous change that will be called forth when “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

The great shout (probably uttered by Christ Himself as at the tomb of Lazarus) will instantly create new bodies for both dead and living believers. “The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Our new bodies will be like Christ’s resurrection body. He “shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Philippians 3:21).

Christ is able thus to create new bodies for us in a moment, just as when He created all things in the beginning: “He spake, and it was done” (Psalm 33:9). HMM

Saturday, June 23

The Unequal Yoke

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Corinthians 6:14)

This is one of the definitive statements in Scripture on the doctrine of Christian separation. Not only should believers refrain from practicing evil teaching and error, they should not join in any formal association with those who do such things, nor should they enter into a binding relationship of any kind with non-Christians.

There may be a question regarding the full scope of this prohibition, though it probably would not apply to civic clubs, professional societies, and other groups with no religious connotations. The context of this verse implies an association of Christians with pagan idolaters, compromising God’s Word with the immoral pantheism of the Greek religions.

The “unequal yoke” seems, therefore, to be one involving an actual “fellowship” and “communion” in some kind of religious or quasi-spiritual union with unbelievers, and this is forbidden, for how “can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). In the modern scene, ancient Greek pantheism has now become one form or another of evolutionary humanism. Thus, the prohibition would at least apply to membership in secret lodges or fraternities with a pseudo-religious structure and purpose, as well as membership in liberal churches or cults in the so-called “New Age” orbit. It clearly must also include marriage or partnership or other formal unions with individuals who, as unbelievers in Christ, are either knowingly or unknowingly affected by such pagan beliefs or practices. Instead of such an unequal yoke, we should be joined only to Christ and His followers, “For,” said He, “my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30). HMM

Prepared Hearts

*“For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.”
(Ezra 7:10)*

It does not come naturally into our hearts to seek, obey, and then teach others the words of God as found in the Scriptures. Therefore, like Ezra, we must prepare our hearts.

The Hebrew word for “prepare” means to “stand erect,” and thus takes special effort. One’s natural “heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jeremiah 17:9), not at all inclined to “stand up” for the Word of God.

But Ezra did, even in the court of a pagan king and in the midst of the enemies of God’s people in a far country, and even among the backslidden people of his own nation. He prepared his heart, fixing it in firm faith on the laws and promises of God. And because he did, he could testify: “I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me” (Ezra 7:28).

On the other hand we read, for example, of King Rehoboam whose rebellion and sin led to the dividing of Israel into two kingdoms and eventually into the captivity. These judgments came because, unlike Ezra, Rehoboam “did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the LORD” (2 Chronicles 12:14).

Thus, our hearts need to be prepared to seek God and His Word, but how do we get them prepared? First, we must come to Him in true humility. “LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart, thou wilt cause thine ear to hear” (Psalm 10:17).

God is then the One who actually prepares our hearts! “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD” (Proverbs 16:1). We can only prepare our hearts to seek and serve God if we humbly call on Him to do the preparing. HMM

Monday, June 25

Young Men

“I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.” (1 John 2:14)

There are two commendations about the “young men” (typically applied to those under 40) that John notes. They are “strong” (vigorous, healthy, both physically and mentally) and the word of God “abides” (remains, endures) in them. These are those who have come through their believing childhood, no doubt guided and counseled by the “fathers” in their lives, who are now active in the “good fight of faith” (1 Timothy 6:12).

Like Abraham, they are “strong in faith” (Romans 4:20), not staggering under the burden of unbelief. Like the leaders in the church at Rome, they are willing to “bear the infirmities of the weak” (Romans 15:1) and to be alert, standing “fast in the faith” (1 Corinthians 16:13). Even though they would have faced opposition from among professing Christians, they were “strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 2:1).

These are the ones who refused to handle the “word of God deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:2), but gladly received it as “it is in truth, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). They know that “the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Hebrews 4:12), and have taken time to store the Word in their heart (Psalm 119:11). These “young men” know that if God’s “words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

Those attributes make possible the result: “Ye have overcome the wicked one.” Safe in the secure saving faith of God, guided by the great truths of the Word of God, these young men have not been “overcome of evil” but have “overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21). HMM III

Made in Christ

*“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”
(2 Corinthians 5:21)*

Many men would boast of being “self-made” men, but no Christian can do this. Everything we are that is truly worthy and eternal was made in us by God through Jesus Christ. Our text is clear on this. We have been made righteous in Christ, but this was only because God made Him to be sin for us.

When He made us righteous in Christ, He also “made us accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). Furthermore, we were “made nigh by the blood of Christ” (2:13). The contexts of these passages make it abundantly clear that our being made righteous, accepted in Christ, and nigh to God, is all of grace; we did nothing to merit such privileges.

This is not all. At the same moment, He also has “made us meet [‘fit’] to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:12). That we in our poverty should be made joint-heirs with Christ once again is only by His unmerited grace. “Being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7).

In promise now and in full reality later, He has “made us kings and priests unto God and his Father” (Revelation 1:6). Positionally, we even share His throne, for He “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

Without Him we are nothing; but in Him we have all things. He is “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). Truly, in salvation as well as in creation, “it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3). HMM

Wednesday, June 27

Thou Shalt Not

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”
(Exodus 20:4)

Many secularists criticize Christianity as being a religion of negativism filled with prohibitions. In response, Christians often try to blunt this criticism by stressing Christian love and freedom from the law.

The fact is, however, that the New Testament also contains many prohibitions, including a restatement of all those in God’s laws as expressed in the Ten Commandments. The first of these in our text prohibits idolatry. Six others also begin with “thou shalt not.” “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain”; “Thou shalt not kill”; “Thou shalt not commit adultery”; “Thou shalt not steal”; “Thou shalt not bear false witness”; “Thou shalt not covet” (Exodus 20:7, 13-17).

It is inappropriate for any Christian to ignore these commandments. Godly behavior is more important now than ever before. Not only are these prohibitions all repeated in the New Testament, but there are numerous other “shalt nots” as well, all directed to Christians saved by grace, apart from the works of the law.

For example: “Be not drunk with wine” (Ephesians 5:18); “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Ephesians 4:26); “Mind not high things Be not wise in your own conceits” (Romans 12:16); “avenge not yourselves” (Romans 12:19); and many, many others.

There are numerous positive aspects to the Christian life, of course, but there are also things a Christian should *not* do. We do not work *for* our salvation, but we must work *out* our salvation, putting *off* the works of the flesh and putting *on* the works of a regenerate life. HMM

To the Fourth Generation

“Thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.” (Deuteronomy 5:9)

This seemingly unwarranted penalty imposed on the innocent grandchildren of the idolater cannot possibly negate the later promise of God through the prophet Ezekiel: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezekiel 18:20).

And certainly it cannot obviate the clear promise of Christ Himself in the last chapter of the Bible: “Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). Anyone who desires to do so may accept the Lord’s gracious offer of salvation, regardless of the possible wickedness or anti-Christian religion of any of his ancestors.

At the same time, a man should realize that his decision to follow a false religion and then bring up his children in that false religion will almost certainly affect his grandchildren and great-grandchildren as well. Many of the latter will actually be children while their great-grandfather is still alive. It is a simple fact that most children (though not all) will continue in their parents’ “religion.” They can, if they wish, choose to leave their parents’ religion and become Christians, but most will not.

What a great responsibility, therefore, each father has! He should quickly accept Christ (whose credentials as our Creator and Redeemer are impeccable!) as his Savior and Lord, and then diligently train his own children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). HMM

Friday, June 29

If I Perish

“Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” (Esther 4:16)

This is the courageous testimony of Queen Esther as she prepared to risk her own life in order to save the lives of her people. It was a capital crime for anyone to intrude into the king’s throne room unbidden, but she was willing to do so in order to do the will of God, knowing that “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

In the same spirit, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were willing to enter the fiery furnace rather than to worship the humanistic gods of Babylon, testifying to Nebuchadnezzar that “our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods” (Daniel 3:17-18).

God did deliver Esther and the three Jewish youths, but there have been many through the ages who have died for their faith rather than deny their faith. All the apostles (save John) died as martyrs, for example, and so have countless others throughout the centuries. “They loved not their lives unto the death” (Revelation 12:11) if it meant denying their Savior.

Believers in many nations are suffering such persecutions today, and the time is coming when the last great God-rejecting king of the earth (called the “beast” in Scripture) will “cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed” (Revelation 13:15). If a similar choice confronts us, may God give us the grace to say with Paul that “Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death” (Philippians 1:20), and with Esther: “If I perish, I perish.” HMM

Working Out Our Salvation

“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” (Philippians 2:12)

We are not told here to work *for* our salvation, but to work *out*—that is, to demonstrate its reality in our daily lives. Our salvation must be received entirely by grace through faith, not of works (Ephesians 2:8-9), or else it is not true salvation. Works can no more *keep* our salvation than they can *earn* it for us in the first place. It is not faith plus works, but grace through faith.

Nevertheless, a Christian believer, if his salvation has been real, can testify that “I will show thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18). Good works—consisting of a righteous and gracious lifestyle, considerate of others and obedient to Christ’s commands—are the visible evidences of salvation. We have been “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

The context of our text, in fact, assures us, on the basis of Christ’s sacrificial death, glorious resurrection, and exaltation (Philippians 2:8-11), that “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (v. 13). God is thereby enabling us to “work out” our salvation in visible practice, through the indwelling Holy Spirit of God.

Thus, it is beautifully appropriate that the life of a genuinely born-again Christian, possessing true salvation, should be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, . . . as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life . . .” (vv. 15-16). We do need to “examine [ourselves], whether [we] be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5), and we are admonished that “we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). HMM

Sunday, July 1

Things of the World

*“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.”
(1 John 2:15)*

We must be wary of the world’s “things,” because we are “in the world,” not “of the world” (John 17:11-16). The command in our text is that we are not to love the world or its things, not that we should remain blissfully ignorant of them. We are to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16).

There are big things of the world like nations and kingdoms (Matthew 4:8; Luke 12:30), as well as cares and riches (Mark 4:19), that can sap our focus and drain our loyalties. And there are “rudiments” and “elements” (Colossians 2:20; Galatians 4:3) that can twist our thinking and “spoil” us (Colossians 2:8).

We are warned that friendship with the worldly lifestyle and that which espouses the “things” of the world makes us an “enemy of God” (James 4:4). That is because such people embrace the “spirit of the world” and not “the spirit which is of God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). Those people speak about the things of the world, and the world listens to them (1 John 4:5).

God’s people may be “base” and “weak”—even “foolish” in the eyes of the world (1 Corinthians 1:27-28). Since the great Creator God has chosen us out of the world (John 15:19), it should not surprise us that the world “hates” those who belong to the Lord Jesus (John 17:14). Hence, the ungodly passions that drive the ungodly behavior of the world, “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

Those passions and the people who embrace them will “pass away.” But “he that doeth the will of God abideth forever” (1 John 2:17). HMM III

Monday, July 2

The Moments of God

“For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer.” (Isaiah 54:7-8)

This gracious promise to Israel gives a beautiful insight into both God’s character and the relation of time to eternity. God can be a God of wrath, for He must punish unforsaken sin in His people, but He is much more the God of mercy. His prolonged judgment on His chosen people of Israel is only “for a small moment” compared to His “everlasting kindness” toward redeemed Israel in the ages to come.

This theme occurs a number of times in Scripture. “For his anger endureth but a moment,” said David, “in his favor is life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning” (Psalm 30:5). To the people faithful to God during a time of judgment against their nation or against the world, God says: “Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers . . . hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast” (Isaiah 26:20).

Thus, a time of testing or judgment may extend over many days, or years, or even centuries, but this is only a moment in relation to the endless ages of blessing yet to come.

As applied to Christians, this concept is stated explicitly in the only occurrence of the Greek *parakutika* (“moment”) in the New Testament. “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Corinthians 4:17). “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD” (Isaiah 65:17, 25). May God give us eyes of faith to see these “moments” of God in their eternal setting. HMM

Tuesday, July 3

Look Back

“Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn, and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged.” (Isaiah 51:1)

While it is not good to dwell too much on the past—whether in pride of past accomplishments or despondency over past failures or grieving over past losses—it is well never to forget what God has done for us. In this passage, Israel is reminded of Abraham and Sarah, who had been lifted out of the pit of paganism and cut out of the rock of idolatry, and whom God had greatly blessed.

David, looking back, had written that God “brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay” (Psalm 40:2). Paul looked back and said: “In time past . . . beyond measure I persecuted the church of God. . . . But when it pleased God, who . . . called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me . . . they glorified God in me” (Galatians 1:13, 15-16, 24).

Whatever our own background may be—bigoted skeptics, or flagrant sinners, or self-righteous hypocrites—God has indeed, if we are now saved by His grace, lifted us out of a pit and set us on a solid rock. We were “strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). But God “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13).

“Such were some of you,” wrote Paul of such gross sins as fornication, idolatry, homosexuality, adultery, and thievery, as well as covetousness and drunkenness. “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 6:11). An occasional look back will help us to remember more often to look up in humble thankfulness for the grace of God. HMM

Wednesday, July 4

True Freedom

“As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” (1 Peter 2:16)

We who live in what the song writer called the “sweet land of liberty” have a great responsibility to preserve that freedom which our forefathers obtained for us at great cost over two centuries ago. At the same time, we must not turn liberty into license. It would surely hurt those brave and godly men if they could see how we now use “freedom of choice” to justify murdering multitudes of innocent children before they are born, and how we use “freedom of speech” to warrant fouling the eyes and ears of our children with widespread pornography and to promote all kinds of immoral behavior in our society in general. No nation can remain free very long after such practices become widely accepted by its citizens. We need to pray for revival!

The same warning applies to the abuse of our spiritual freedom in Christ. As the apostle Paul said and repeated: “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient” (1 Corinthians 6:12; also 1 Corinthians 10:23, where he added that “all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not”).

As Peter says in our text, even though we are “free” and have real “liberty,” we are nevertheless “servants of God,” where the Greek word *doulos* actually connotes “bond servants,” or even “slaves.” Our liberty in Christ is not freedom to sin whenever we so choose, but rather freedom from our former bondage to sin. “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Romans 6:18).

Although our nation is rapidly becoming anti-Christian in belief and practice, we Christians can still best serve our nation and our Savior by practicing and proclaiming Christ’s wonderful saving gospel of free salvation from sin and regeneration unto righteousness. HMM

Thursday, July 5

God Knows What We Don't Know

"I know, O LORD, that thy judgments are right, and that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me." (Psalm 119:75)

One of the most perplexing aspects of the Christian life is trying to understand God's purpose when defeat or affliction comes into our lives, thereby hindering or even halting our ministry and testimony for Him. Many have been the servants of God who were sincerely working for Christ, seeking to obey His will and His Word as best they understood them, but then suddenly were laid aside by sickness, or had their ministries stopped by the enemies of God (sometimes even by fellow Christians), or for some other reason, and could not discern why God allowed it.

What then? When affliction comes, we must simply trust God, knowing that whatever He does is right and that our affliction is invested with His faithfulness. He is our Creator and, through Christ, has also become our heavenly Father: "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). He knows what we don't know, therefore we can "know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

This verse (Romans 8:28) is one of the most familiar and most wonderful promises in the Bible, but it is one of the most difficult to believe in time of affliction or loss. Nevertheless, it is God's promise, and "all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

God knows the end from the beginning, and in that wonderful day when Christ returns, "then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 Corinthians 13:12). Until then, we must simply trust Him. HMM

Friday, July 6

The “Light” Equation

“*God is light.*” (1 John 1:5)

The biblical text is rich with metaphors and similes, one of which often appears in John’s writings. God is said to be “light”—the most constant, clearly observable, and all-pervasive experience in our universe.

God’s *life* is the *light* of men (John 1:4).

God’s light is not conquered by darkness (John 1:5).

God’s light attracts men who love truth (John 3:21).

Jesus is the “light of the world” (John 8:12).

John’s emphasis in his epistle is focused on the *application* of the “light” in our lives. Since God *is* light (our text; see also 1 Timothy 6:16), we can never be a participant in the *life* of God apart from the *light* of God (1 John 1:6). If we claim fellowship with God, we must “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7). Since God is the “true light” (1 John 2:8), we are not part of His family if we despise those He loves (1 John 2:9).

It is equally obvious that since God is holy (Psalm 99:9) and righteous (Daniel 9:14), the light that we are to “shine” (Matthew 5:16) must be a “radiant” righteousness visible to all who come in contact with us (Proverbs 4:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:5).

Our breastplate of righteousness (Ephesians 6:14) should “blind” the ungodly with the brilliance of our lifestyle of holiness—so much so that even if we are spoken against by those who hate God, they will be forced to glorify God (“adorn with luster”) because of our good works (1 Peter 2:12).

Because the God of our salvation is “the light of the world” (John 9:5) and we have been made “the children of light” (Ephesians 5:8), “ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). HMM III

Saturday, July 7

Eternal Life

“. . .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)

Although this powerful, five-chapter letter from the apostle John is full of vital insights into the Christian life, it is written to “little children” (1 John 5:21) so that they might “know” the majesty and wonder of eternal life.

John begins his epistle with a reminder that he “knew” this Jesus from whom the promise of eternal life came (1 John 1:1-3). John was an eyewitness to Christ’s resurrection (John 20), which is the most powerful proof of the claims and promises of the Lord (Acts 17:31).

Much of that which is applied in John’s epistle is based on the precise teachings of the Lord Jesus Himself, heard by John and recorded in John’s gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (John 20:31).

Those who believe will “not perish” (John 3:15-16).

The “water” of Christ springs up to “everlasting life” (John 4:14).

Whoever has everlasting life “is passed” from death to life (John 5:24).

Those who come to Christ will “never hunger” (John 6:35).

No one is able to “pluck” the believer out of the Father’s hand (John 10:28-30).

“Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:26).

Based on the Word of God, John gives us several experiential tests by which we can know that we “live”:

We love and keep His commandments (1 John 2:3).

We know and love the truth (1 John 2:20).

We love the brethren (1 John 3:14).

We have God’s Holy Spirit (1 John 4:13). HMM III

Sunday, July 8

Savor of Life or Death

“For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16)

It is remarkable how the very same testimony can have such dramatically opposite effects on its recipients. A lecture on the scientific evidences of creation, for example, or on the inspiration of the Bible will be received with great joy and understanding by some, provoke furious hostility in some, and generate utter indifference in others. This seems to be true of any message—written, or verbal, or simply demonstrated in behavior—which has any kind of biblically spiritual dimension to it. It is like the pillar of cloud in the wilderness, which “came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night” (Exodus 14:20). A Christian testimony draws and wins the one, repels and condemns the other. Some there are who “loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:17).

Thus, the wonderful message of the gospel yields two diametrically opposite results. “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). Christ came to bring both unity and division. “Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious. . . . Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient. . . a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word” (1 Peter 2:6-8).

But the wonderful thing is this: Whether a true testimony generates life or condemns to death, it is still “unto God a sweet savor of Christ.” HMM

Monday, July 9

Dividing Light from Darkness

“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.” (Genesis 1:3-4)

Initially, the created cosmos was in darkness—a darkness that God Himself had to create (“I form the light, and create darkness”—Isaiah 45:7). But then the dark cosmos was energized by the Spirit’s moving, and God’s light appeared. The darkness was not dispelled, however, but only *divided* from the light, and the day/night sequence began, which has continued ever since.

This sequence of events in the physical creation is a beautiful type of the spiritual creation, “a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Each individual is born in spiritual darkness, but “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). We are now “partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,” because He “hath delivered us from the power of darkness” (Colossians 1:12-13).

However, the light in the primeval darkness resulted only in a division of night and day. The night still comes, but God has promised that in the coming Holy City, “there shall be no night there” (Revelation 22:5).

Just so, even though we have been given a new nature of light, the old nature of darkness is still striving within, and we have to be exhorted: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8). Nevertheless, “the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Proverbs 4:18). When we reach that city of everlasting light, all spiritual darkness will vanish as well, for “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth” (Revelation 21:27), and we shall be like Christ. HMM

Tuesday, July 10

Catastrophe or Cataclysm

“[God] spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly.” (2 Peter 2:5-6)

These two verses speak graphically of two different kinds of terrible physical convulsions, both of which were divine judgments. The volcanic upheaval that sent fire from heaven pouring over the wicked cities of the plains was called an “overthrow” (Greek *katastrophe*, from which, obviously, we get our English word “catastrophe”). Great upheavals such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, and hurricanes are rightly called catastrophes.

But such events are only local or regional in extent and occur relatively often. There was one event, however, that was unique in all history. When God brought the “flood” upon the ungodly antediluvian world, the word used to describe it was the Greek *kataklusmos*, and this word is never applied in Scripture to any event except the terrible Genesis Flood, when “the world that then was, being overflowed [Greek *kataklyzo*] with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6). From these Greek words we derive the English word “cataclysm.”

There was never any flood like this flood! It covered all the world’s mountains, and everything on the land died, leaving great fossil deposits and great beds of lithified sediments all over the world.

There has been only one worldwide cataclysm in the past, but another is coming—global fire instead of global water. Jesus said, “For as in the days that were before the flood [i.e., *kataklusmos*] they . . . knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be” (Matthew 24:38-39). HMM

Wednesday, July 11

Saints and Sinners

“Then Job answered the LORD, and said, Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.” (Job 40:3-4)

It is remarkable how the saintliest of men often confess to being the worst of sinners. The patriarch Job was said by God Himself to be “a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil” (Job 1:8). Yet, when Job saw God, he could only say, “Behold, I am vile.”

And consider Abraham, who is called “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11). When he presumed to talk to God, however, Abraham said that he was “but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27).

David, “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1), and “a man after [God’s] own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14), said: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). Isaiah, the greatest of the prophets, testified when he came into God’s presence: “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips” (Isaiah 6:5).

The angel recognized Daniel the prophet as “a man greatly beloved” by God (Daniel 10:11). Yet, when Daniel saw God, he fell on his face and said: “My comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength” (Daniel 10:8).

In the New Testament, the apostle Peter said: “I am a sinful man, O Lord” (Luke 5:8), and Paul called himself the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). God dwells “in the light which no man can approach unto” (1 Timothy 6:16).

The closer one comes to the Lord, the more clearly one sees his own sinfulness and the more wonderful becomes God’s amazing grace. No one who is satisfied with his or her own state of holiness has yet come to know the Lord in His state of holiness! None dare face the Lord except by His grace through the mediator Jesus Christ. HMM

Thursday, July 12

Resisting the Devil

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

The devil is far more powerful and intelligent (as well as subtle and seductive in his malignant purposes) than any combination of human enemies we could ever face, and we would be utterly unable to defeat him with our own human resources. Yet, God’s Word makes it plain that we are neither to *yield* to him nor *flee from* him. Instead, the admonition is: “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

But how can we resist such a mighty foe? As in our text, we must constantly maintain sobriety and vigilance against his enticements, and be careful to remain “steadfast in the faith.” Otherwise, the pseudo-intellectualism and social peer pressure to which we are subjected daily could quickly persuade us to compromise the faith, or even to depart from the faith.

We are commanded not to yield and not to compromise. Instead, we must “put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” We have “the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the [wicked one],” and also “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:11, 16-17).

This mighty sword with which we can make Satan flee from us is literally “the saying of God”—that is, an appropriate individual word from the complete Word of God. This was the instrument with which the Lord Jesus Himself resisted the devil, parrying each temptation with an incisive thrust of Scripture. The result then—as it will be now with us also—was that the devil “departed from him for a season” (Luke 4:13). HMM

Friday, July 13

He Became Poor

“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

The doctrine of Christ’s *kenosis*, or self-emptying, is one of the most amazing of all biblical truths. The extent to which He who was not only “in the form of God” but also “equal with God” condescended to “make himself of no reputation” (the translation of *kenoo* in Philippians 2:6-7) is utterly beyond human comprehension.

He who once sat on the throne of the universe came to Earth “lying in a manger” (Luke 2:12). Throughout His public ministry, He had “not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). Because He had no money to pay the tax, He had to catch a fish with the necessary coin in its mouth (Matthew 17:27). In His agony at Gethsemane, none of His friends would pray with Him, and when He was arrested they all “forsook him and fled” (Matthew 26:40, 56). No one defended Him at His trial.

On the cross, the soldiers stripped away His only personal possessions—the clothes on His back—and then “parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take” (Mark 15:24). When He died, His body had to be buried in a tomb belonging to Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:59-60). No home, no money, no possessions, no defenders, not even a tomb of His own in which to lie.

But He had a cross on which to die, and because He was obedient to the death of the cross, “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9). Through His poverty we become rich, through His homelessness we have a mansion in heaven, and through His terrible death on Calvary we have everlasting life. Yes, we do know the grace of Christ! HMM

Son of Man

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.” (Revelation 14:14)

This is the last of some 87 New Testament references (84 in the four gospels, one in Acts, none in the epistles, two in Revelation) to Christ as the Son of man. Here we see the Son of man coming on a white cloud from heaven (just as He had ascended into heaven after His resurrection) as the conquering King of all the earth.

What a contrast is this to the first New Testament reference to the Son of man. “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). From humility and poverty on Earth to power and riches in heaven, and for all eternity—this was His journey when Christ left His heavenly glory to join the human family.

In between the poverty and the power lay the whole human experience, for He “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Finally, as Son of man He must die for man’s sin, for “the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again” (Luke 24:7). Even in heaven He is still the Son of man, for Stephen saw Him thus: “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).

There is, indeed, a great man in the glory! Christ called Himself “the Son of man” much more often than “the Son of God,” though He will eternally be both, the God/man. He delights to identify with those whom He has redeemed, for He “is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Hebrews 2:11). “Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?” asked Jesus. Then we say with Peter, “Thou art . . . the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:13, 16). HMM

Sunday, July 15

No Darkness at All

“. . . in him is no darkness at all.” (1 John 1:5)

Some have suggested that the gospel message is the most important truth in the Bible—and, perhaps, from a temporal human standpoint it may well be. However, there is another, more frequent message throughout all of Scripture here summarized by John: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5).

In the Bible, God’s “light” is clearly focused on intellectual and moral holiness. That unique holy nature both drives and limits the revelation of Himself to His creation.

In the intellectual sense, God is the source of all truth (Psalm 119:130; Psalm 36:9). The holiness of God requires truth, and because of His holiness God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Whenever God reveals anything, He must reveal the truth about Himself and His nature.

The opposite of truth, even though it may contain some truth, is the active agent that opposes God’s truth as it is revealed to His creation.

Lies (darkness) oppose the revelation of that truth:

- In the created “things” (universe)
- In the written Word (Scripture)
- In the “new” creation (salvation)

The incarnate Creator God must reveal truth and cannot “be” untruth. When God speaks, He must speak truth. When God acts, He must “do” truth. God’s holiness demands that the creation not distort anything about God—or about the creation itself.

God could not create a lie—He could not make anything that would inexorably lead us to a wrong conclusion. God could not create processes that would counter His own nature—or that would lead us to conclude something untrue about Him. HMM III

Strive Not About Words

“Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.” (2 Timothy 2:14)

This command emphasizes the necessity to avoid “word fights.” The apostle Paul has much to say about this in other passages. “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). Our words should be “wholesome words” (1 Timothy 6:3), “that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Corinthians 1:10).

We are not to “give heed to fables and endless genealogies” (1 Timothy 1:4), but are to “refuse profane and old wives’ fables” (1 Timothy 4:7). We are not to listen to “commandments of men, that turn from the truth” (Titus 1:14), and we must “avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law” (Titus 3:9), “knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Timothy 2:23).

According to 1 Timothy 6:4-5, those who love “word fights” are “proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words.” Such a person is a “questionaholic.” Here is a short list of the biblical warnings about such fights.

It brings ill will toward others; wrangling; bickering.

It produces “railing” defamation or dishonor of others.

It encourages private plots to hurt.

It produces an incessant meddlesomeness.

It ends up rotting the intellect and robbing truth.

It equates personal gain with godliness.

May God protect us from those who are driven to strive “about words to no profit.” May God increase our love for “acceptable words; and that which is written, upright, even words of truth” (Ecclesiastes 12:10). HMM III

Tuesday, July 17

The First Love

“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.” (John 17:24)

This is the very heart of the moving prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ in the upper room before His arrest and crucifixion. As we hear Him pray, we are translated back in time, before time began, and there we encounter the indescribable love within the counsels of the triune Godhead—Father, and Son, and Spirit—three persons, yet one God.

Then, after speaking of this love, Jesus prayed—in the final words of His sure-to-be-answered prayer—“that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them” (v. 26).

This love—the love within the Trinity—was the primeval love and, therefore, is the spring from which flows every other form of true love—marital love, mother love, brotherly love, love of country, love of friends, love for the lost, or any other genuine love.

It is appropriate that the first mention of love in the Old Testament refers to the love of a father (Abraham) for his son Isaac (Genesis 22:2), and then that the first reference to love in the New Testament (Matthew 3:17) speaks of the heavenly love of God the Father for God the Son. In both cases, the son is called “beloved,” yet in both cases the father and son are prepared to go to the altar of sacrifice, that the will of God might be done and a way of salvation be provided for lost sinners.

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32). One day—as He prayed—we shall be with Him, see His glory, and even experience His own eternal love in our hearts. HMM

Thine, O Lord

“Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all.” (1 Chronicles 29:11)

This is one of the great doxologies of Scripture, originally a part of King David’s prayer at the time of Solomon’s coronation as his successor. Although David and Solomon were the greatest kings of Israel, and two of the greatest kings in the world of their age, David rightly acknowledged that the Lord Himself was the true King, not only of Israel, but of all heaven and Earth. He is head, the supreme ruler, over all.

This is the first occurrence in Scripture of the great testimony of worship: “Thine is the kingdom.” In the modern world, however, there are relatively few who acknowledge Him as King of creation. Except for a small minority, most people believe that the universe has evolved and man is king.

But David’s prayer will be echoed again in the great prayer of the cherubim: “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Revelation 4:11). Then, soon afterward, “the four and twenty elders” utter their prayer: “We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty . . . because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned” (Revelation 11:16-17).

Someday, every knee will bow and every tongue shall confess Him as King of kings and Lord of lords. “Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. . . . Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. . . . Blessed are all they that put their trust in him” (Psalm 2:6, 10, 12). In that day, “there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him” (Revelation 22:3). HMM

Thursday, July 19

They That Wait upon the Lord

“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isaiah 40:31)

This is one of the best-loved promises of the Bible, for it is easy to grow weary and faint in our mortal bodies, even when doing the work of the Lord. The answer, we are told, is to “wait upon the LORD.”

But what does this mean? The Hebrew word (*gavah*) does not mean “serve” but rather to “wait for” or “look for.” It is translated “waited for” the second time it is used in the Bible, when the dying patriarch Jacob cried out: “I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD” (Genesis 49:18).

The first time it is used, surprisingly, is in connection with the third day of creation, when God said: “Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place” (Genesis 1:9). That is, the all-pervasive waters of the original creation, divided on the second day of creation, now are told to wait patiently, as it were, while God formed the geosphere, the biosphere, and the astrosphere, before dealing again with the waters.

Perhaps the clearest insight into its meaning is its use in the picture of Christ foreshadowed in the 40th Psalm. “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry” (Psalm 40:1).

“The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary” (Isaiah 40:28), and His gracious promise is that we can “renew our strength” (literally, “exchange our strength,” our weakness for His strength!) by “waiting upon [Him].” We wait patiently for Him, we gather together unto Him, we look for Him, we cry unto Him, we trust Him, and He renews our strength! HMM

Friday, July 20

Fellowship with the Father

“. . . and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.” (1 John 1:3)

One marvelous reason for which God has adopted us (Ephesians 1:5), indeed part of the very “calling” to become God’s children, is to fellowship (1 Corinthians 1:9) with the great God of creation!

Jesus prayed (John 17) that His chosen disciples might have the same kind of relationship with the heavenly Father that Jesus Himself had throughout eternity. Our minds may not totally grasp that wonder down here—except as we try to understand something of the key of walking “in the light” (1 John 1:7).

The nature of light in our universe gives us clues:

Light is unchangeable; one cannot make light dark.

Light exposes everything (reveals and brings clarity).

Light is the sustainer of all life as we know it.

The nature of darkness is also very instructive:

Darkness is driven away by the smallest spark.

Darkness covers everything (hides and obscures).

Darkness will kill all life as we know it.

“The path of the just is as the shining light. . . . The way of the wicked is as darkness” (Proverbs 4:18-19). The promise of fellowship with God is that He “will lead them in paths that they have not known” and that He “will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight” (Isaiah 42:16).

Therefore, “let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation” (1 Thessalonians 5:8). Since we were “sometimes darkness” (Ephesians 5:8) but have been delivered from “the power of darkness” (Colossians 1:13), we should no longer “fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Ephesians 5:11). HMM III

Saturday, July 21

Why Did Christ Die?

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

This passage is often considered the defining passage of the gospel, stating the great truth that Christ died for our sins, then was buried (thus stressing that His resurrection was a physical resurrection, not just spiritual), and then rose again. As such, it is interesting that verse 1 which introduces it (“I declare unto you the gospel”) contains the central mention of the more than 100 times the Greek word for “gospel” occurs in the New Testament.

However, it does not say *why* Christ died for our sins. It was not just to pay for our salvation and make us happy. There are, in fact, numerous references to His substitutionary death that *do* give us further insight into just why Christ died for us and our salvation.

For example, “he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15). And consider Galatians 1:4, in which Paul tells us that Christ “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world.”

Peter’s testimony and explanation was that the Lord Jesus “his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24). John said: “[God] loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:10-11).

There are many other verses to the same affect. Christ did not die merely to save our souls but to empower us to live in a way that would glorify God right here on Earth. HMM

Sunday, July 22

The Sin of the Devil

“Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods: for in the thing wherein they dealt proudly he was above them.”
(Exodus 18:11)

This is the first mention in the Bible of the sin of pride, and it appropriately refers to the primeval sin of the “gods”—that is, the supposed deities of the heathen.

Led by Lucifer, a great host of the created angels had rebelled against their Creator, seeking also to be “gods” like Him. Lucifer, later to be called Satan (i.e., “adversary”), thought he could become the highest of all. “O Lucifer . . . thou hast said in thine heart, I will . . . exalt my throne above the stars of God: . . . I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell” (Isaiah 14:12-15).

Satan’s sin—and that of the other self-proclaimed “gods”—was that of “being lifted up with pride . . . the condemnation of the devil” (1 Timothy 3:6). But they shall all, with him, eventually “be brought down to hell” and the “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).

This was also the sin of Adam and Eve, for Satan had seduced them with the promise “ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5).

It is also the sin of all humanists and evolutionary pantheists, from Adam’s day to our day, for they seek to do away with God and make “gods” out of “corruptible man.” They have “worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” (Romans 1:23, 25).

But “pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Our Lord of creation is “above all gods,” even in that “thing wherein they dealt proudly.” The sin of pride was the very first sin and is still the most difficult sin to overcome, but “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). HMM

Monday, July 23

Christ in Suffering and Triumph

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8)

In the final book of the Bible occur seven great “I am” assertions by the glorified Christ, all speaking of His ultimate victory. However, in the book of Psalms occur seven vastly different “I am” statements by Christ, all speaking prophetically of His sufferings. These are in four of the wonderfully fulfilled Messianic psalms, all written 1,000 years before Christ, yet each psalm cited in the New Testament is fulfilled by Christ.

“But I am a worm, and no man” (Psalm 22:6, comparing Christ to a mother “scarlet worm” who dies so that her young may live, and in so doing gives off a scarlet fluid that protects and nourishes her young).

“I am poor and needy” (Psalm 40:17).

“I am . . . a stranger unto my brethren” (Psalm 69:8).

“I am full of heaviness” (Psalm 69:20).

“I am poor and sorrowful” (Psalm 69:29).

“I . . . am as a sparrow alone upon the house top” (Psalm 102:7).

“I am withered like grass” (Psalm 102:11).

In contrast to these lonely sufferings of Christ, there are the glories that shall follow. The first of the seven “I am’s” of Revelation is our text above, and four of the others proclaim the same great truth (Revelation 1:11, 17; 21:6; 22:13).

The self-existing One, the “I am,” *Jehovah*, the Lord Jesus Christ, who created all things (Alpha), will one day triumph and make all things new forever (Omega). Listen to the other two wonderful testimonies: “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore” (Revelation 1:18). “I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16). HMM

Tuesday, July 24

A Still, Small Voice

“And after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.” (1 Kings 19:12)

Elijah was in hiding for his life, even though God had spectacularly answered his prayer with fire from heaven. Jezebel, however, had not been intimidated by Elijah’s victory and swore she would kill him. He fell into such depression that he wanted to die. If Jezebel could not be impressed with fire from heaven, how could Elijah ever hope to defeat her and her armies? Not even an angel could remove his doubts.

But then was sent “a great and strong wind,” and “after the wind an earthquake” (1 Kings 19:11). But the Lord was not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. God finally reached Elijah with “a still small voice,” and that voice assured him that God was well in control of all circumstances. Similarly, Moses told the children of Israel, as they faced the Red Sea: “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD” (Exodus 14:13).

It was prophesied of the Lord Jesus that “he shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.” Nevertheless, it was also promised “he shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth” (Isaiah 42:2, 4; see also Matthew 12:19-20).

In our human impatience, we think God should always move immediately in great strength. Unless there are large numbers of converts and displays of power, we grow discouraged, like Elijah. But God more often speaks in a still, small voice and works in a quiet way. “And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, . . . And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isaiah 30:18, 21). HMM

Wednesday, July 25

When God Repents

“And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent.” (1 Samuel 15:29)

There are a number of Scriptures that speak of God repenting. For example, in the days before the great Flood, “it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth” (Genesis 6:6). In the same chapter containing our text, God said: “It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments” (1 Samuel 15:11). Yet, the Scriptures plainly teach that God changes not. “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent” (Numbers 23:19). Bible critics have made much of this apparent “contradiction” in the Bible.

There is no contradiction, of course. The words translated “repent” in both Old and New Testaments are used of actions that indicate outwardly that a “change of mind” has occurred inwardly. It is precisely because God does not repent concerning evil that *His* actions will change toward man when man truly repents (this human “repentance” can go either way, changing from good to evil, or vice versa), and God will respond accordingly, since He cannot change His own mind toward evil.

Thus, He said concerning national repentance: “If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them” (Jeremiah 18:8). That is, if the nation truly repents, then God will change His own projected course of action. He seems outwardly to “repent” specifically because He *cannot* repent in His inward attitude toward good and evil.

God has greatly blessed America in the past, but America’s people have drastically changed in recent years. Can the time be long coming when God must say: “It repenteth me that I have so favored this apostate nation?” HMM

Too Hard for God?

“Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.” (Genesis 18:14)

This rhetorical question posed to Abraham by the Lord was in response to Sarah’s doubts concerning His promise that they would have a son. It would, indeed, require a biological miracle, for both were much too old for this to happen otherwise. With God, however, all things are possible, and He can, and will, fulfill every promise, even if a miracle is required.

This same rhetorical question was asked of the prophet Jeremiah. “Then came the word of the LORD unto Jeremiah, saying, Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?” (Jeremiah 32:26-27). The One who created all flesh, who raises up kings and puts them down, could surely fulfill His promise to restore Israel to its homeland when the set time was come.

But Jeremiah had already confessed his faith in God’s omnipotence. “Ah Lord GOD! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee” (Jeremiah 32:17). The God who called the mighty universe into being would not fail to keep His promise and fulfill His will.

Actually, the word translated “hard” in these verses is more commonly rendered “wonderful,” or “marvelous,” or an equivalent adjective, referring usually to something miraculous that could only be accomplished by God. For example, “marvelous things did he . . . in the land of Egypt” (Psalm 78:12). “For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone” (Psalm 86:10).

The first occurrence of the word (Hebrew *pala*), however, is in our text for today. There is nothing—no thing—too hard for the Lord, and we should never doubt His word! HMM

Friday, July 27

That Old Serpent

“And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years.”
(Revelation 20:2)

This prophetic vision given to John leaves no doubt as to the identity of the serpent in the Garden of Eden. That “old serpent” (literally, “that primeval serpent”) who deceived our first parents into rebelling against the word of God is none other than the Devil, or Satan, often viewed in Scripture as typified by a “great dragon” (Revelation 12:9), the fearsome animal of ancient times, probably the dinosaur.

His ultimate doom is sure—he will be bound a thousand years, then finally be “cast into the lake of fire . . . tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). At present, however, he is not bound, for “your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). We must be sober and vigilant, “lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Corinthians 2:11).

His devices are manifold, but all are deceptive (he was the most “subtle” of all God’s creatures, Genesis 3:1), malevolent, and designed to turn us away from the true Christ. “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:3).

He is a great deceiver. He can appear as a fire-breathing dragon or a roaring lion, deceiving us into fearing and obeying him instead of God. He can also be “transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14), deceiving us into trusting the “feigned words” of his “false teachers” (2 Peter 2:3, 1) instead of the Holy Scriptures of the God of creation. Our recourse against his deceptions is to “put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Ephesians 6:11). HMM

Remember the Day of Rest

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.” (Exodus 20:8-10)

The Hebrew word for “remember” actually means to “mark” or “set aside.” The Israelites didn’t need to be told to “remember” the sabbath, because all nations had been keeping time in weeks ever since creation (Genesis 2:1-3). (Note the references to the sabbath in the sending of God’s manna, prior to the giving of this commandment [Exodus 16:23-29].) But they *did* need to be reminded to mark it as a holy or rest day, as God had done in that first week.

The Hebrew word for “sabbath” does not mean “Saturday” any more than it means “Sunday.” It means, simply, “rest” or “intermission.” The institution of the sabbath (that is, one day out of every seven days to be “set aside” as a day of rest, worship, and remembrance of the Creator) was “made for man” and his good (Mark 2:27). It was even of benefit to the animals used by man (note the mention of “cattle” in the commandment). It had been a pattern observed since the completion of God’s six days of creation and making all things at the very beginning of world history (note Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:11).

It is still appropriate today, as well. “There remaineth therefore a rest [that is, ‘a sabbath-keeping’] to the people of God” (Hebrews 4:9). All men have a deep need to remember their Creator and His completed work of creation at least once each week, as well as His completed work of salvation—especially in these days when both of these finished works are so widely denied or ignored. HMM

Sunday, July 29

Good Courage

“Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I sware unto their fathers to give them.” (Joshua 1:6)

This admonition to be strong and of “good courage” (Hebrew *amass*) is given some ten times in the Old Testament, plus another nine times using a different word (*chasaq*). The first occurrence of *amass* is in Deuteronomy 3:28, where it is translated “strengthen”: “But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.”

Christians today surely need good courage to face a dangerous world with all its temptations and intimidations, but nothing today could compare to the challenge facing Joshua. Trying to lead a nondescript multitude of “stiff-necked” desert nomads into a land of giants and walled cities would surely require courage beyond anything we could imagine today.

But Joshua had access to invincible resources, and so do we. “Be strong and of a good courage,” God told him. “Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest” (Joshua 1:9).

Giants and walled cities are no match for the children of God when He goes with them, for “if God be for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:31).

God *did* go with Joshua, and the Israelites defeated the giants, destroyed the walled cities, and took the land. And we have the same promise today, for “he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Hebrews 13:5-6). Courage is really another name for faith, and “what he had promised, he was able also to perform” (Romans 4:21). HMM

Monday, July 30

What We Have Now in Christ

“That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.” (John 3:15)

The one who is trusting Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord has many wonderful possessions that cannot be seen with our physical eyes but that are as real and permanent as if we were already in heaven. Many of these (only a few of which can be listed here) are noted by the present tense of the verb “have” (Greek *echo*).

First of all, as our text indicates (and these are the words of Christ!), we who believe in Him *have*—right now—eternal life. Our sins have been taken care of by the sacrificial death of Christ, “in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7; see also Colossians 1:14). Our sins will be remembered against us no more, because we have already been eternally redeemed. Then, also, in spite of all our sins and failures, “being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).

One of the great resources we now have, but use so seldom, is the capacity to “think God’s thoughts after Him.” “For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16).

Having the mind of Christ should keep us from sin. Nevertheless, “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1). Not only do we have an advocate defending us, but we have a priest as our mediator. “We have a great high priest, . . . Jesus the Son of God” (Hebrews 4:14).

Finally, we already “have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1). And all this is only the beginning! “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard . . . the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). HMM

Tuesday, July 31

Rightly Divide the Word

“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)

This command is for us to “give diligence” (Greek *spoudazo*) for God’s approval by “rightly dividing” the word of truth. That which is to be rightly divided is not in doubt: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The end goal is to “display yourself” as one who is, therefore, approved by God.

The key is to “rightly divide” the Scriptures. The Greek word *orthotomeo*, only used this one time, has several shades of meaning: to cut straight, to cut straight ways; to proceed on straight paths, hold a straight course; to make straight and smooth; to handle aright; to teach the truth directly and correctly.

Two passages emphasize the way to “divide” the Scriptures. When Isaiah asked rhetorical questions about how to learn and understand biblical knowledge, the answer was “precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isaiah 28:9-10). Thus:

Find the major pieces first.

Find the supporting elements next.

Find the pieces throughout the text.

Solomon, as the “wise preacher,” noted that one who would teach the people knowledge must have given “good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs” (Ecclesiastes 12:9).

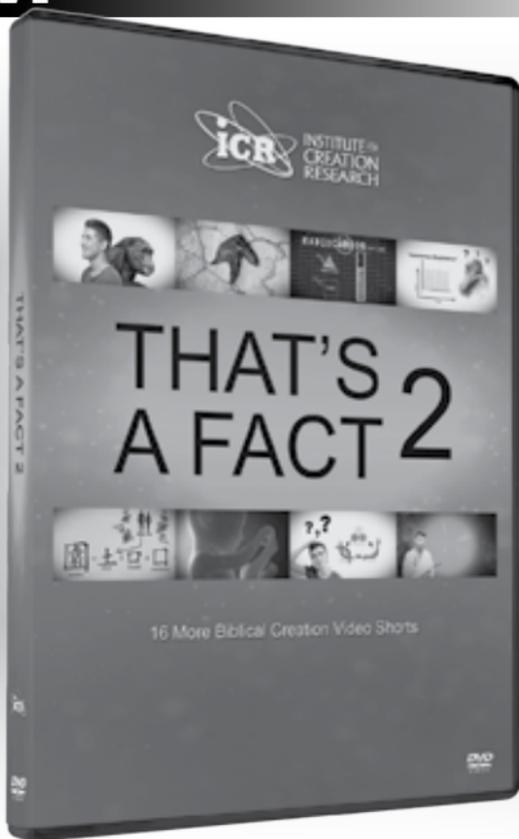
Pay attention to the words (meanings, context).

Penetrate (research) the teaching (text first, then books).

Organize the information for teaching purposes.

This kind of study preparation requires a “workman”—one who is willing to give the diligence necessary to produce the powerful sayings built on the “word of truth.” If properly prepared, the workman will never be “ashamed.” HMM III

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Wednesday, August 1

How to Pray

“Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:24)

Jesus promised that “whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23). This condition for answered prayer and its resulting fullness of joy is not just a formula with which to end a prayer. “In my name” implies representing Him and what He stands for, so that our prayer could truly be His prayer as well.

For example, our prayer must be in His will. “If we ask any thing according to his will . . . we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15).

We need also to recognize that God’s great purpose in creation is of higher priority than our own personal desires, so this should be of first order in our prayers. Jesus said: “When ye pray, say, Our Father . . . Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth” (Luke 11:2). We can also pray for our own needs, of course, especially for God to “deliver us from evil” (Luke 11:4), the closing request in His model prayer.

It is good to seek God’s wisdom in all our decisions and undertakings, so that we can be confident we are indeed in His will, but our request for such guidance must be sincere and in willingness to act on His answer. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God But let him ask in faith” (James 1:5-6). And it should be obvious that the request be made with a clear conscience before God. “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18).

But when we are indeed confident that we are praying “in His name” with all that this implies, then we should pray earnestly, for “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16), and when the answer comes—as it will, in God’s time—then our joy indeed will be full! HMM

Thursday, August 2

Shun Babblings

“But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus.” (2 Timothy 2:16-17)

Paul’s earlier warning about “word fights” (2 Timothy 2:14) is strengthened in the text above with a different emphasis. Word fights are “picky” debates started by quarrelsome people. They are useless and divisive. They create conflicts and schisms.

Profane and vain babblings, however, are worldly and valueless “noise.” Less obvious and more subtle than fighting, they have the effect of destroying godliness. “But refuse profane [ungodly] and old wives’ fables [myths, baseless stories], and exercise thyself rather unto godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7).

Because “godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Timothy 4:8), Paul strongly urged Timothy to “keep [guard] that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: which some professing have erred concerning the faith” (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

The “oppositions” spoken of are the “antithesis”—the conflict, the stand against knowledge. Paul calls this anti-knowledge a *pseudonumos*—a false name. It sounds like knowledge but is *not* true.

The results of these “babblings” are not good. Ungodliness will increase. Error will eat away at spiritual health and truth like gangrene. The two church leaders that Paul mentions, Hymenaeus and Philetus, are listed as examples of such a cancer. They taught that the resurrection had already occurred for the saints.

Peter’s warning is very similar: “Beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness” (2 Peter 3:17). HMM III

Friday, August 3

“I Am” in the Pentateuch

“And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.”
(Genesis 15:7)

There are seven “I am’s” in the book of Genesis. The first is a beautiful figure of speech (“I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward” [Genesis 15:1]), but the others are all names and titles of God. The first of these is in our text above, identifying *Jehovah* Himself (the LORD) with the “I am.”

The next is Genesis 17:1: “I am the Almighty God.” The Hebrew here is *El Shaddai* (“God the nourishing sustainer”), also found in 35:11. Next is in 26:24: “I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee.” Then, “I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac” (28:13). “I am the God of Bethel” (31:13). *Beth-el* means “the house of God.” Finally, God says: “I am God, the God of thy father” (46:3).

In Exodus, there are 21 places where God says “I am.” Most of these are merely variations of the different names of God as noted above in the “I am’s” of Genesis, but six do give new insight. The first, of course, is the great assertion of Exodus 3:14 where God identifies Himself as “I AM THAT I AM.” The others: “I am the LORD in the midst of the earth” (8:22); “I am the LORD that healeth thee” (15:26); “I the LORD thy God am a jealous God” (20:5); “For I am gracious” (22:27); “I am the LORD that doth sanctify you” (31:13).

In the remaining books of the Pentateuch, the phrase “I am the LORD your God” occurs very frequently, but there are two important new “I am’s.” “I am holy” occurs six times (e.g., Leviticus 11:45), and “I am thy part and thine inheritance” is recorded in Numbers 18:20. The great theme of all these claims and names of God is that the mighty God of time and space is also a caring, personal God. We can trust Him, and He cares for us. HMM

Saturday, August 4

The Name of the Lord

“And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Exodus 3:14)

This unique name of God was given to stress the truth that He is timeless. The name “LORD” (Hebrew YHWH = *Yahweh*, or *Jehovah*) is essentially the same, conveying the truth that He is the eternal, self-existing One.

The Lord Jesus Christ appropriated this divine name to Himself when He told the Jews: “Before Abraham was [i.e., ‘was born’], I am” (John 8:58). Correctly assuming that this statement was nothing less than a direct claim to identity with God, the Jews immediately (but unsuccessfully) attempted to stone Him to death as a blasphemer.

As the I Am, the Lord Jesus Christ is, indeed, everything, and He has revealed Himself to us under many beautiful symbols. It is well known that there are seven great “I am’s” in the gospel of John, each of which is rich with spiritual depth of meaning. They can be listed as follows:

“I am the bread of life . . . the living bread” (John 6:35, 51).

“I am the light of the world . . . the light of life” (John 8:12).

“I am the door of the sheep” (John 10:7).

“I am the good shepherd . . . [who] giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

“I am the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25).

“I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

“I am the true vine” (John 15:1).

It is well known that this magnificent self-assertion of the Lord permeates the whole Bible, from its first use in Genesis 15:1, “I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward,” to its final occurrence in Revelation 22:16, “I am . . . the bright and morning star.” And all these beautiful figures help us to pray more fervently “that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:28). HMM

Sunday, August 5

The Will of the Lord

“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:17)

There is no more exalted theme in the world than the will of God, nor is there a more important practical question than how to know the will of God. Of greatest significance is the recognition that it is *His* will—not *man’s* will—that is important.

God desires for us to know His will—both His will in general, as revealed in Scripture, and His specific will in each particular decision. The latter must in every instance, of course, be fully compatible with the former, as the Holy Spirit, who leads us, will never contradict the Scriptures that He inspired. Thus, an indispensable prerequisite to finding the *personal* will of God is knowing His *general* will.

The general will of God is expressed, first of all, in the fact of special creation (Revelation 4:11). Then Christ became man in order to accomplish God’s will (Hebrews 10:7) as our sin-bearing substitute; “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Hebrews 10:10). It is His will that this should provide salvation to all who believe. “This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life” (John 6:40). This in turn entails individual regeneration of all who receive Him, “which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:13).

Furthermore, His will includes absolute security in Him (John 6:39), our sanctification (1 Thessalonians 4:3), and ultimate glorification (John 17:24). Thankfulness in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18) and a virtuous (“well doing”—1 Peter 2:15) life are also God’s will. A believer who understands, believes, and obeys God’s general will is then prepared to know and follow His specific will. HMM

Monday, August 6

The Presence of the Lord

“And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden.” (Genesis 3:8)

The presence of the Lord can be either a cause of fear or a source of blessing. Adam and Eve were greatly afraid of His presence because of their sin, and their son Cain “went out from the presence of the LORD” (Genesis 4:16) because of his sin. Yet it will also be to many a time of great joy. “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?” (1 Thessalonians 2:19).

The difference, of course, is the presence or absence of unforgiven sin in the presence of the Lord. Most of the sixteen occurrences of the phrase stress the judgmental aspect. Those who reject Christ’s offer of forgiveness through repentance and faith in His death for our sins will eventually be banned forever from His presence, like Cain. “When 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: [They] shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

But for those who have repented of their sins and trusted in Christ for salvation, the prospect of the coming and personal presence of the Lord Jesus is one of joyful anticipation, for “in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psalm 16:11).

When He comes again, we shall be presented “faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24) and shall thenceforth “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:17). HMM

Tuesday, August 7

The Sure Foundation

“Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure.”
(2 Timothy 2:19)

The preceding verses of this section of 2 Timothy are replete with warnings about the damage that could be done through “babblings” and cancerous words. But God is unshaken by whatever man might do. “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he” (Deuteronomy 32:4).

“I am the LORD, and there is none else,” Isaiah joyfully quotes (Isaiah 45:6). “I am the LORD, I change not,” the prophet Malachi is told (Malachi 3:6), and there is “no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (James 1:17) in the God of creation. God’s sovereign will is absolute: “The word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8). “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isaiah 46:10).

We who are the twice-born, and thus the children of God, can stand firm and steadfast in the knowledge that He who is “sure” is the One who is working in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). He has adopted us as His children “by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Ephesians 1:5).

It is no random act of capricious fate that has secured us. It is the sure foundation of the great Creator God. It is His divine power that has “given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” That calling rests on “exceeding great and precious promises” that enable us to participate in the “divine nature” and escape the awful “corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:3-4). HMM III

Vessels of the House

“But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.” (2 Timothy 2:20)

The “house” referenced here by Paul to young Timothy is the “house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). In the Old Testament, the tabernacle and temple were the dwelling place of God and the center of worship led by a high priest from the tribe of Levi.

Now, we are members of the Lord’s “house” (Hebrews 3:6) and are like “lively stones” that are being “built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5), led by Jesus, who is the “high priest over the house of God” (Hebrews 10:21).

This “great house” has many “vessels” in it of different values. Some are “honorable” instruments (vessels of high value) that serve in the New Testament economy in some parallel function to that of the vessels of the inner court of the tabernacle and temple. Those instruments of gold, silver, and brass (Exodus 25; 2 Chronicles 4) each played a part in the liturgical worship, designed as part of the “schoolmaster” to teach us about the law of God (Galatians 3:24). The more public and formal the use, the more valuable the vessel. The most valuable were set closest to the Holy of Holies.

There are also vessels of “dishonor” in the great house. The tabernacle and temple had “earthen” vessels for certain functions (Leviticus 14). These were expendable—necessary, perhaps, for some short-term need, but not valuable. Since the church now functions as the “pillar and ground” of the truth, the “honorable” vessels are expected to purge themselves from that which is “dishonorable.” HMM III

Thursday, August 9

Walking in Truth

“I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.” (2 John 1:4)

This beautiful metaphor, “walking in truth,” is found only in the two one-chapter epistles of John—here in our text, and in 3 John 1:3 and 4. This principle should indeed characterize our daily lives, since our Lord and Savior is Himself “the truth” (John 14:6), the Word of God that we believe is “truth” (John 17:17), and the Holy Spirit who indwells our bodies is the very “Spirit of truth” (John 15:26).

The New Testament also uses other characteristics of the Christian life under this figure of walking. When a person is born again through faith in Christ and testifies of this by following the Lord in baptism, he or she is said to be raised to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

Then, since the Holy Spirit has come to indwell our bodies, to comfort, guide, and constrain us as needed, we are exhorted to “walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). Furthermore, we are commanded to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (Ephesians 5:2). This is not erotic love, of course, or even brotherly love, but unselfish *agape* love that sacrifices its own interests for the needs of others.

There are still more such exhortations. “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5). Furthermore, we are to “walk in the light, as he is in the light” (1 John 1:7).

All of these and other similar admonitions can be summarized as simply following the example of Christ. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked” (1 John 2:6). “He that followeth me,” said Jesus our Lord, “shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). HMM

Friday, August 10

Vessels of Honor

“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.” (2 Timothy 2:21)

There are several metaphors used by the New Testament writers to help us understand aspects of God’s Kingdom. “Fowls” make a home in the mustard seed “tree” (Matthew 13:31-32). “Tares” grow up with the “wheat” (Matthew 13:25). A “house” represents the church of God (1 Timothy 3:15), in which are both honorable and dishonorable “vessels” (2 Timothy 2:20).

The first step in becoming an honorable vessel is to “purge” oneself from that which is dishonorable. The Greek term *ekkathairo* and its derivatives all are connected to active cleansing from falsehoods and defilements, as well as separation from those who tolerate ungodliness. “Purge out therefore the old leaven,” Paul insists, “that ye may be a new lump” (1 Corinthians 5:7). Those who are the twice-born are to “possess” their “vessel” in honor (1 Thessalonians 4:4). Some, like Paul, are “chosen vessels” (Acts 9:15).

All who would seek “honorable” service must be sanctified (set apart) for the Master’s use. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Corinthians 7:1). An honorable vessel must be prepared (ready) for good works.

Honorable and effective service in the house of God requires that such vessels must be willing to “sanctify the Lord God in your hearts” (1 Peter 3:15). There is no greater honor than being counted “sanctified, and meet for the master’s use.” HMM III

Saturday, August 11

Things to Flee

“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Timothy 2:22)

There are times to stand and there are times to flee. There are some things so fearful and deadly that it is foolish to try to face them at all. The only rational course, when confronted by them, is to *flee*!

The most obvious of all such enemies is the wrath of God, for His judgment is terrible and eternal. Therefore, His message to all unsaved men and women is to “flee from the wrath to come” (Matthew 3:7—the first occurrence of “flee” in the New Testament) by receiving Christ as Savior.

It is wise to refrain from all kinds of sin, but certain sins have such deadly consequences, even in this present life, that the Scriptures warn us to flee from them. “But thou, O man of God, flee these things” (1 Timothy 6:11). In context, the apostle Paul is here warning against “the love of money” (v. 10) and those who suppose “that gain is godliness” (v. 5). Those who desire to be rich, he says, “fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (v. 9). Therefore, *flee* from this temptation!

He also warns us to “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14)—that is, from worshipping and serving any part of the creation “more than the Creator” (Romans 1:25). This warning is especially appropriate today when there is such a wide resurgence of evolutionary pantheism.

Also, we must “flee fornication” (1 Corinthians 6:18). This is a deadly danger to the Christian in this day of amorality. Finally, as our text says, young believers (and old believers need this admonition, too!) should “flee also youthful lusts,” if we are to be able to “call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” HMM

Faith

“But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (John 1:12)

Scripture teaches that “by grace are ye saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8), and that faith (or belief, same word) in the substitutionary work of Christ on the cross is essential to salvation (John 3:15-18, etc.). But faith does not stop there; it grows as a Christian matures. Let us look at some of the characteristics of a growing faith in God.

One who has accepted God’s gracious offer of forgiveness and salvation, one who, by faith, has found God trustworthy, comes to trust Him and His promises in other areas as well. Paul, who had been sorely persecuted for his faith, claimed, “Nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Timothy 1:12). God will faithfully fulfill His promises, and we can have faith that He will.

The great heroes of faith, some of whom are listed in Hebrews 11, all had one thing in common. They dared to trust God for great things, even impossible things, and moved out on that basis. Consider Joshua: “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Hebrews 11:30). Joshua was confronted with an impossible problem but dared to trust God for a solution.

Then there is the mature faith that can “rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him” (Psalm 37:7) in the face of hardship and opposition. “For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD . . . shall inherit the earth” (v. 9).

At every stage of our Christian lives, God allows us opportunities to exercise and expand our faith. Remember, “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6). JDM

Monday, August 13

To Die Is to Live

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.” (Mark 8:35)

The principle expressed in this verse must be of paramount importance, for it is found repeated in one way or another probably more often than any other single principle in the New Testament. Note the following examples representing at least four separate messages from the Lord Jesus:

Matthew 10:39: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”

Matthew 16:25: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”

Luke 9:24: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.”

Luke 17:33: “Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.”

John 12:25: “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.”

This remarkable divine paradox—that to die means to live—is also found expressed in many other ways in the epistles. Paul says, for example: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live” (Galatians 2:20). Note also such Scriptures as Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15; 6:9-10; Philippians 1:21-24; 2 Timothy 2:11-12.

There are many pietistic Christians who interpret such passages as implying a so-called “deeper life” that is attained by certain Christians and not by others through some mystical experience. However, Jesus did not say to lose one’s life for a deeper life, but for “my sake and the gospel’s”! Christ wants us to live in simple obedience to His will as recorded in His Word, proclaiming in all we say and do that He is Creator, Savior, and coming King. HMM

Tuesday, August 14

It Is Enough

“And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.” (Genesis 45:28)

When someone exclaims, “It is enough,” either a requirement has been satisfied, a need has been fulfilled, or a limit has been reached. This phrase occurs seven times in the Old Testament (two different Hebrew words) and three times in the New (each a different Greek word).

In its first occurrence (our text), Jacob is overcome with thankful emotion at the news his beloved son, long thought dead, is still alive. For a very different reason, Pharaoh later cried: “Entreat the LORD (for it is enough) that there be no more mighty thunderings and hail” (Exodus 9:28).

“It is enough: stay now thine hand” (2 Samuel 24:16; 1 Chronicles 21:15). God’s command to the death angel stopped the destruction of Israel following David’s sin of numbering his people. Later, when Elijah thought he could bear no more, “he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough” (1 Kings 19:4).

On the other hand, “there are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: The grave; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough” (Proverbs 30:15-16).

In the New Testament, Jesus said: “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord” (Matthew 10:25). As His arrest drew near, He told His disciples: “It is enough, the hour is come” (Mark 14:41). When they produced two swords, “he said unto them, It is enough” (Luke 22:38).

There are many types of circumstances that can lead one to cry: “Enough!” But “in the ages to come,” there will never be an end to “the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). We can never get enough of God! HMM

Wednesday, August 15

Flee and Follow

“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Timothy 2:22)

The first part of this twofold command is to run away from young (new, untested) desires. Sexual immorality is especially to be avoided because “every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Two other dangerous desires are identified in the New Testament. We are warned to “flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14) and to flee from the “love of money” (1 Timothy 6:10-11). Obviously, there are many “lusts” wrapped up in these categories. They are all dangerous because they are “untested” and deceitful.

Such things will inhibit and injure the Christian. “The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful” (Mark 4:19). “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16).

Such warnings are so common in Scripture that it is easy to become inured to them. But they are critical to a godly life. We are told to “make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Romans 13:14), but to be “as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts” (1 Peter 1:14) in order to escape “the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Peter 1:4).

In contrast, we must follow after righteousness. The “youthful lusts” can be conquered by the “pursuit” of a godly lifestyle. Even the devil will flee if he is resisted in the faith (James 4:7). HMM III

Thursday, August 16

Foolish Talking

“Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.” (Ephesians 5:4)

In the book of Ephesians are included several guidelines for the Christian’s speech—how we should talk and what we should talk about. These are not easy rules to follow but are necessary if we would please our Savior and be effective in our Christian lives and witness.

As our text indicates, vulgar talk, idle chatter, and coarse jesting should “not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (5:3). “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (4:29).

The same applies to bitter, angry, malicious speech. “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice” (4:31). And certainly our communications should be true and trustworthy. “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor” (4:25).

Thus, our words should not be crude or obscene, idle or foolish, bitter or angry, false or malicious. Instead, they should be good words, true words, gracious words, intended to edify—that is, build up—our hearers in their own Christian lives.

Further, if we would win others to Christ, we must always be “speaking the truth in love” (4:15). What we say to them must be fully in accord with both biblical truth and genuine Christian love. Finally, we should “be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (5:18-20). Gracious, edifying words can only come from a thankful heart. HMM

Friday, August 17

Rejoicing Greatly

“Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations.” (1 Peter 1:6)

Our lives today are continually badgered by various trials, or “manifold temptations.” The trials are to bring about a pure and effective faith, pleasing to God. But the apostle Peter is not referring to trials or their results when he declares: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice.” On the contrary, he is summing up a list of blessings given in the preceding three verses. As we delineate them, let us rejoice as well.

“His abundant mercy” (v. 3). Mercy implies a compassionate act on one who is in desperate need. In context, God’s mercy was granted to us in salvation when there was nothing we could do to save ourselves.

“Begotten us again” (v. 3). We have been born again! We are now His children, born into His family. We now have spiritual life—eternal life.

“A lively hope” (v. 3)—not just a living hope—it is much more than that. We have a hope that is actively, vibrantly alive. This “lively” state was accomplished in and through the bodily “resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Our eventual, eternal resurrection is thus assured.

“An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (v. 4). This inheritance could not be more secure or more glorious.

“Kept by the power of God” (v. 5). The protection of God extends far beyond the inheritance; it encompasses the individual heir also—the one who has tasted of His mercy “through faith unto salvation.”

“To be revealed in the last time” (v. 5). Though the saved are now freed from the penalty and power of sin, there will be a final deliverance from the presence of sin.

Indeed, there is much about which to “greatly rejoice.” JDM

Follow Righteousness

“Follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” (2 Timothy 2:22)

The word “follow” is frequently translated “persecute” in other passages. Jesus used the word this way: “The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). The connotation of the Greek term includes a dogged and relentless effort.

Anyone who wants to serve the Lord Jesus faithfully must be determined to pursue righteousness. Those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness” are promised both happiness and fulfillment (Matthew 5:6). Those who seek “first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness” have the promise that God will supply all their earthly needs (Matthew 6:33).

Perhaps a quick review of some of the passages that require “pursuit” of a godly lifestyle would be helpful.

- “Let us therefore *follow after* the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:19).
- “*Follow after* charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy” (1 Corinthians 14:1).
- “I *press* toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14).
- “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but *ever follow* that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men” (1 Thessalonians 5:15).
- “But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and *follow after* righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1 Timothy 6:11).
- “*Follow* peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

Even this short list should keep all of us on our knees asking both for forgiveness and for strength to obey. HMM III

Sunday, August 19

The Living Word

“And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.” (Revelation 19:13)

This uniquely expressive name assigned to Christ, as He returns to Earth in glory, is used also by John in his gospel (John 1:1, 14) and in his epistle (1 John 1:1), referring both to His primeval work of creation and also to His human incarnation. It is well known that “Word” here is the Greek *logos*. Six times it is applied by John as a name or title of the Son of God (three times in John 1:1), the second Person of the Trinity. Actually, John used it seven times, assuming that the disputed verse 1 John 5:7 (“the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost”) is really a part of the inspired text.

The Greek word *logos* is a remarkable word, adaptable to many meanings. It is translated in the King James New Testament by about 30 other words (“speech,” “saying,” “reason,” etc.). The lexicons add still other meanings, and some of the Greek philosophers used it to describe the intelligence behind the universe.

As used by John, it becomes much more specific: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The Jehovah’s Witnesses, rejecting the deity of Christ, like to translate this as “the Word was a god,” but all knowledgeable Greek scholars agree that the King James rendering is correct. Then, says John, “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Even though “no man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18), He has become knowable through His Son who has “declared him.” Consequently, John also can declare Him to others. “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes . . . and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; . . . That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:1, 3). HMM

Monday, August 20

The Truth in Us

“For the truth’s sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.” (2 John 1:2)

The word “truth” occurs more in the gospel of John than in any other book of the New Testament, and it occurs in the first epistle of John more than in any other book except John’s gospel. Then, it occurs more in John’s two one-chapter epistles (2 and 3 John) than in any other New Testament book save John and 1 John. Surely one of the great themes in John’s writings is truth!

God is, indeed, the God of truth, and His written Word is “the scripture of truth” (Daniel 10:21). “For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth” (Psalm 33:4). The Lord Jesus Christ is, in fact, the very incarnation of truth. “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” He asserted (John 14:6).

Surely truth dwells forever in Christ, for He is Himself the Creator and is thereby the very definition of truth. But how can it be that truth dwells in us and shall be with us forever? This is certainly not the case with the natural man.

It can only be by the Holy Spirit, of course, and this is what Christ—who is the truth—has promised. “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17).

That being so, with the Holy Spirit of truth indwelling us forever, our words, and deeds, and our very lives should be characterized by truth and complete consistency. “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor” (Ephesians 4:25). “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). HMM

Tuesday, August 21

Perilous Times

“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” (2 Timothy 3:1)

There has always been some confusion about the biblical term “the last days.” Many times the phrase is associated with the Great Tribulation period. Some commentaries appear to relate the era to the final days just before the Lord returns to put an end to the universe.

It does appear, however, that the “last days” began officially at Pentecost when the prophecy of Joel 2:28-29 was fulfilled and verified by Peter in his sermon recorded in Acts 2:14-21. That same Peter reaffirmed that the Lord Jesus “was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Peter 1:20). And, just so there could not be any doubt, the apostle John said simply, “Little children, it is the last time” (1 John 2:18).

Paul’s warning to Timothy was that these last days will be filled with “perilous times.” The Greek term translated “perilous” is *chalepos*. Its basic meaning is “stress” or “fierce,” coming from a root word meaning to “reduce strength.” Other Bible versions translate the term as “dangerous” or “difficult” times. The word could well be understood as “strength-sapping pressure.”

The “times” that will be perilous are “seasons” or “periods” that will characterize these “last days.” The verses that follow our text contain a list of the kinds of “peril” that will “stress” those who would live godly lives. This warning is not unique. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Timothy 4:1).

No wonder we are told: “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12).
HMM III

Wednesday, August 22

Ungodly Lifestyles

“For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” (2 Timothy 3:2-4)

The warning in the previous verse to our text for today insists that “perilous times” will characterize the last days. This list describes the types of people who will dominate the last days, and it is frightful.

The “self love” of these people is demonstrated by internal motivations driven by the sin nature. Such people will be “covetous”; the Greek term means “fond of silver.” They will also be “boasters” (braggarts) who revel in their sinful behavior. That boasting is driven by a “proud” spirit that is arrogant, willing to show off gaudy ostentations of their conquests. Such behavior, of course, leads them to be “blasphemers,” speaking evil with low, vulgar taunts designed to be injurious.

Part of this list includes Greek words with an “un” prefix. There are those who are *un*-persuadable by parents, obstinate, stubborn, and inflexible. Many are *un*-thankful, without grace, without thanks, and without any pleasantries. All are *un*-holy, without the nature to be just or moral. Some are *un*-affectionate, without a natural love for family or friends. There are also those who are *un*-reconcilable, not able to make or keep a promise.

Finally, there will be those who are *diabolos* (like the devil). They are slanderous liars, “incontinent” (without self control), savage “despisers” who are opposed to “those who are good.” They will be treacherous, rash, and “high minded” people who are “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.”

But, “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). HMM III

Thursday, August 23

Understanding the Word of God

*“So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.”
(Nehemiah 8:8)*

Most people—even most Christians—devote very little time to the Scriptures, complaining that they are either too hard to understand or too uninteresting. Yet, when Ezra read “the book of the law of Moses” to the whole congregation of Israel, he read “from the morning until midday,” even “one fourth part of the day,” and “all the people stood up” as he read (Nehemiah 8:1, 3, 5; 9:3). Such a scenario is almost impossible to imagine today.

Ezra’s congregation evidently understood what he was reading and found it of vital interest. “For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law” (Nehemiah 8:9). For “another fourth part [of the day] they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God” (Nehemiah 9:3).

Yet, all they had were the books of the Pentateuch! How much more concerned we should be, and how much better we should understand, when we have the entire Bible.

Note that Ezra and his colleagues simply read the Scriptures and gave a straightforward exegesis. That was enough to enable the people to understand, and this brought repentance, confession, and worship. No emotional appeals, no gimmicks, no technology, just the Scriptures—taken naturally and literally.

The Scriptures are not hard to understand—just hard to believe, and even harder to obey. Like any book, the Bible is intended to be understood, and its author—the Holy Spirit—was able to say what He meant. The secret is in the attitude of heart with which one approaches it. “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. . . . Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psalm 119:97, 104). HMM

Thou Hast Rejected Knowledge

“My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.” (Hosea 4:6)

This lament over the ancient apostasy of Israel embodies an age-long principle that surely applies to those nations today that once professed Christianity but are now dominated by humanism. Our own nation is experiencing an awful scourge of moral anarchy among our children and young people, and the reason why is because their parents and grandparents have largely “forgotten the law of thy God.”

America—particularly its intellectual leadership—has “rejected knowledge,” so its people are being “destroyed for lack of knowledge.” This ignorance exists despite an abundance of supposed actual knowledge (i.e., “science”) in our educational institutions, for such facts are almost universally taught in a secular context. Our teachers have forgotten that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge” (Proverbs 1:7).

Even in evangelical and fundamentalist churches and schools today, there is often too little emphasis on *knowledge* and too much on *experience*. Christian faith is not “feeling”; it is volitional commitment to a true intellectual understanding of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,” said Christ (Luke 13:5). The Greek word for “repent” means “change your *mind*!” One can only believe right if he first thinks right, and this requires true knowledge.

Listen again to Hosea’s warning: “The LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy [i.e., kindness], nor knowledge of God in the land” (Hosea 4:1). “They have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). HMM

Saturday, August 25

Delusion from God

“And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie.” (2 Thessalonians 2:11)

This is a startling declaration! Why would God want to deceive people and cause them to believe a lie? The “cause” that would activate such an extreme decision on God’s part must be very serious. The preceding verse states it plainly. It is “because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Because they “resist the truth” (2 Timothy 3:8), they will “believe the lie”!

The specific context refers to those who elect to follow the coming “man of sin,” but the principle is timeless. It tells us that God’s attitude toward men is determined by their love of the truth rather than by their knowledge of the truth. When people love God’s truth, there is no limit to the amount of truth and blessing they may receive from God. Note the attitude of the writer of Psalm 119: “How sweet are thy words unto my taste!” “Thy testimonies . . . are the rejoicing of my heart.” “I love thy commandments above gold.” “Thy law is my delight” (Psalm 119:103, 111, 127, 174).

But when people begin to exhibit a disdain for God’s truth, there may soon come a time in their lives when they find it impossible even to *comprehend* the all-important truth of God’s saving gospel (creation, salvation, and reconciliation through Christ).

Because they refused the love of His truth when it would have been easy to believe, a blindness gradually engulfs their minds until they love the deceptive philosophies of the world, and they never escape the strong delusion that God has allowed to engulf them. Henceforth, though they are “ever learning,” they are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 3:7). How important it is, as early in life as possible, to receive from God His proffered gift of the love of His truth! HMM

Sunday, August 26

The Danger of Adding to Scripture

“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:18)

This sober warning almost at the end of the Bible was given by the glorified Lord Jesus Himself (note v. 20) so should be taken very seriously.

The Bible is not just a great book. It is *The Book!* Its content had been “for ever . . . settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89) but had been gradually transmitted to men on Earth through God-called prophets, whose writings were “given by inspiration of God”—that is, literally “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). “God . . . at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1).

In various ways—sometimes by direct dictation, more often by Spirit-guided research and meditation using each man’s individual style and abilities—God conveyed His message down to mankind. Finally, the New Testament was given through Paul and others “by revelation . . . revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Ephesians 3:3, 5). John was the last of the “apostles and prophets” when he wrote Revelation (all the others had been martyred), and Christ then indicated (see text above) that nothing more could be added, not just to John’s obviously finished book of Revelation, but really to the now-completed body of inspired Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Those “false prophets” (Matthew 24:11) who have tried to add some new revelation to the Bible (e.g., Mohammed) need urgently to go back to the Bible alone. We need no new revelation. The Bible is more than enough for our salvation (2 Timothy 3:15, etc.) and all needed guidance until Christ returns (2 Peter 1:19). HMM

Monday, August 27

The Danger of Diluting Scripture

“And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” (Revelation 22:19)

This final testimony and warning of Christ to those who profess to be His followers is a clear command not to either augment (Revelation 22:18) or dilute the inspired “words” (not just “thoughts”) of the Bible. There are many people in the various cults following some leader who thinks he or she has received some new inspired word from God. That is very unwise. But it is usually certain leaders in the mainline denominations who presumptuously either cull out or explain away those Bible verses they consider unscientific or offensive in some way. That is even more dangerous, for those whose names are not found “in the book of life” will be “cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:15).

Whether men believe it or not, the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. It is true that any two Christians may interpret certain passages in different ways. But they won't be too far apart if they believe the Bible to be the inerrant, understandable, inspired Word of God, especially if they really believe that God is able to say what He means. The Bible authors do occasionally use figurative language, of course, in which case any symbols are usually explained in context. When the writer clearly intends to be understood literally, as in the first chapter of Genesis for example, it is dangerous to impose some metaphorical meaning on the passage because of outside considerations. This seems to be what Paul called “handling the word of God deceitfully” (2 Corinthians 4:2) and can become a very slippery slope for those who choose that broad and easy way. It will be easier at Christ's judgment seat to explain why we believed God than why we believed men who questioned God. HMM

Confession

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)

The Bible book in which this glorious promise is given was written entirely to the saint of God, not to the unbelieving sinner.

- Confession is what saints do when they sin.
- Repentance is what sinners do before they become saints.
- Confession is agreement (identity) with the sin against God.
- Repentance is reversal (changed mind) to trust (from me to God).

Psalm 51 is a classic prayer of confession. King David poured out his heart of sorrow for the terrible affair with Bathsheba and yearned for God to “wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (v. 2). David acknowledged that “against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight” (v. 4). He confessed his sin, and asked God, “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation” (v. 12).

Three of the gospels record the declaration of Jesus that “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17). Repentance is not an apology for specific sins, it is a heart-mind-soul turning from self-righteous sufficiency to God’s holiness. It is the lost that repent, not the saved: “Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Luke 15:7).

One day, however, “every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:11). Far better to repent in sorrow today than confess in terror at the Judgment. HMM III

Wednesday, August 29

Make It as Sure as You Can

“Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.” (Matthew 27:65-66)

Pilate had endured many strange experiences leading up to the crucifixion of Christ. Both he and some close to him (v. 19) had wanted to release Him, finding no fault in Him (v. 23). But, for political expediency, willing to pacify the Jewish leaders and quell a potential riot, Pilate had agreed to the execution. But once Christ was dead and in the grave, Pilate’s troubles did not end.

Perhaps we are justified in reading a tone of sarcasm and impatience in Pilate’s words “make it as sure as you can.” What is there to fear from a dead man? Guard the tomb if you want. But just perhaps Pilate was hounded by unexplained doubts; maybe a guard could prevent the bizarre fears from becoming reality.

From our perspective, however, we can see divine irony in these words. Satan had seemingly won a great victory on the cross, for the Heir had been slain. Thus, the one act that he had to prevent was that of the actual resurrection, for all of Christ’s message depended on His victory over death.

Note the limitation in the words “as sure as you can.” How tightly sealed and well-guarded must a tomb be to contain the Creator of all things? If His purpose was to die and rise from the dead, would man’s or Satan’s efforts be able to thwart it? “As sure as you can” was surely not sure enough!

Today we know that the tomb’s sealed entrance was breached, not so much to allow Him out but to allow us to see inside. Satan’s henchmen still deny the resurrection, but their efforts are just as futile as those who tried to keep Him inside. The fact remains, He left the tomb, triumphantly offering eternal life to all who believe! JDM

Thursday, August 30

The Jewels of the Lord

“And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” (Malachi 3:17)

The jewels of the Lord are not rubies and diamonds but rather are “they that feared the LORD” and who “spake often one to another.” Instead of being mounted in a crown or other adornment as precious stones would be, these jewels will be listed in a very special book. “A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name” (v.16). What a blessing it would be if, when we get to heaven, we should find our names written in that special book of God’s memories! God does take note of our times of spiritual fellowship with other believers—especially, no doubt, when they occur during times of stress and worldly opposition.

This word (Hebrew *cegullah*) is not the usual word for “jewels,” more commonly being rendered “peculiar treasures.” For example, Psalm 135:4 says that “the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.” The word suggests treasure carefully guarded in a safe place. The word is translated simply “special” in Deuteronomy 7:6, “a special people unto himself.”

Note in particular Exodus 19:5-6: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”

Peter uses the same language in writing to prepare Christians for imminent times of persecution. “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9). HMM

Friday, August 31

Godliness in Form Only

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” (2 Timothy 3:5)

Those with a “form of godliness” are much more difficult to recognize than those who are openly wicked. Jesus gave His most harsh criticism to the hypocritical leaders of the religious sects of His day. Jesus also warned of “false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Matthew 7:15).

On another occasion, Jesus illustrated the challenge of identifying those who looked like God’s people but were really “tares” that the Enemy had sown among the wheat. In His parable, Jesus indicated that even the “servants of the householder” might uproot the wheat along with the tares (Matthew 13:24-30). The Corinthian church was warned about the same problem when they were told that “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14).

We are strongly urged to “turn away” from these kinds of people. They have the ability to cause serious damage among the churches. They will “creep” into “houses” (a metaphor for churches—1 Timothy 3:15) and will lead “silly women” away with many different desires (2 Timothy 3:6). They will resist the truth and will have power like the magicians of Egypt who deceived Pharaoh and opposed Moses. And like those magicians, their minds are corrupt (focused on sin) and are already condemned (2 Timothy 3:8).

The good news is that they will be forcibly stopped and exposed as foolish (2 Timothy 3:9). Peter notes that they will have swift destruction (2 Peter 2:1-3) and will utterly perish in corruption (2 Peter 2:12-13). Like the magicians who produced snakes, blood for water, and frogs aplenty (Exodus 7-8), they will be unable to go any further and will be forced to say, “This is the finger of God” (Exodus 8:19). HMM III



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