



Days *of* Praise

June ♦ July ♦ August 2024

Days *of* Praise

Daily Bible Readings and Devotional Commentaries

June • July • August 2024

*“In God is my salvation and my glory:
the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.”
(Psalm 62:7)*

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the King James Version of the Bible

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Introduction to
DAYS OF PRAISE

“Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?” (John 11:25-26)

Dear Christian friend,

Who but the Lord Jesus could make the astounding claim that anyone who dies will live again if they believe in Him? Incredible!

Certainly these verses require careful thought and prayerful meditation to begin to understand the profound message that Christ is conveying. He is at the center of the relationship between a Christian’s mortal, physical life and their eternal soul. How can that be? Because only Jesus is the resurrection and the life!

Thank you for gathering with us throughout this summer quarter as we seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of our great Savior. I’m praying that the Holy Spirit uses each of these short devotionals to help you fall deeper in love with the Lord Jesus and our good heavenly Father.

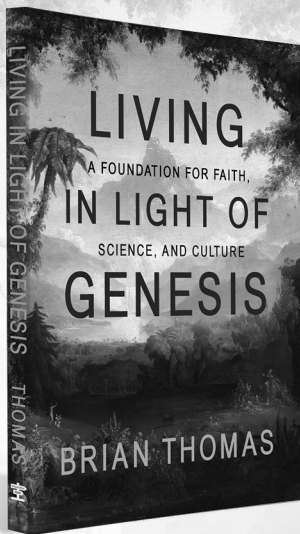
Sincerely yours in Christ,

Randy J. Guliuzza, President

Contributors:

HMM	Henry M. Morris, Ph.D.
HMM III	Henry M. Morris III, D.Min.
JDM	John D. Morris, Ph.D.
CCM	Charles (Chas) C. Morse, D.Min.
BDT	Brian D. Thomas, Ph.D.

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Saturday, June 1

God's Shadow

“The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of the LORD, was taken in their pits, of whom we said, Under his shadow we shall live among the heathen.” (Lamentations 4:20)

In the hot desert lands so familiar to the Israelites, a place of shade was considered a blessing wherever it could be found. This was often taken as a symbol of God's protection from the hot hatred of their (and His) enemies. In fact, the Hebrew word for “shadow” is used 12 times in the Bible as a type of God's guarding presence.

The first is in Psalm 17:8: “Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings.” Three other times “the shadow of thy wings” is used (Psalm 36:7; 57:1; 63:7). Isaiah speaks of His presence “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” and as like being hidden “in the shadow of his hand” (Isaiah 32:2; 49:2; also 51:16). The Lord is compared to “a tabernacle for a shadow in the day time from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain” (Isaiah 4:6). He is “a shadow from the heat” and like “the shadow of a cloud” (Isaiah 25:4-5).

The last reference to God's shadow is in our text above in reference to the forced exile of God's people into Babylon. In this sad context, Jeremiah laments that even “the anointed of the LORD”—that is, literally, the Lord's Messiah (fulfilled in Jesus Christ)—has been taken captive with His people. He is even called “the breath of our nostrils,” recognizing implicitly that it was He who breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life in the beginning (Acts 17:25). Thus, He will even be with His people as they undergo their just chastisements; they can even “live among the heathen” under His shadow. No matter how dark our circumstances, we can say with the psalmist: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty....in him will I trust” (Psalm 91:1-2). HMM

Sunday, June 2

The Cup of Salvation

“What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD.” (Psalm 116:12-13)

Here is a remarkable question and answer. To everyone born into the world, God has given multitudes of benefits. “He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). Some receive more than others, but all receive many, so the question is what we should do for the Lord in return. The answer is simply to receive His great gift of eternal salvation!

On one occasion, the people of Capernaum asked Jesus: “What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?” His answer must be profoundly surprising to anyone who believes that he can please God and earn salvation by doing good works. “This is the work of God,” said Jesus, “that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:28-29).

The truth is we can never pay for our sins by good deeds. If one is ever to be saved from his sins and to obtain salvation, it must be received solely by faith in the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. “For the wages of sin is death,” but “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” so that “the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” and—in the words of our text above—“whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 6:23; 5:8; 5:15; 10:13).

Therefore, when a repentant sinner calls in faith on the wonderful name of our gracious Lord, he drinks of the healing cup of salvation and receives everlasting life. Because Jesus drank the bitter cup of God’s righteous judgment on our sins, we can drink deeply of the “living water....springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:10-14), and we can say with the psalmist: “My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever” (Psalm 23:5-6). HMM

Monday, June 3

The Healing Ministry of Jesus

“When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.” (Matthew 8:16-17)

The earthly healing ministries of Jesus are here said to have fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” The Hebrew words used do allow this New Testament application, so this passage does, indeed, predict the healing work of the Messiah in His earthly ministry. Isaiah 53:5-6 then predicts the substitutionary atoning work of the Messiah, concluding with the statement: “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

The order is important. The healing ministry preceded the atonement, just as the prophecy of healing preceded the prophecy of Christ’s atoning work. This means that particular healings cannot be a part of the atonement itself. The reason for the earthly healing work of Christ was “that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins” (Matthew 9:6).

The saving work of Christ includes deliverance from the death penalty for sin in one’s *past* life, the power of sin in this *present* life, and the very presence of sin in the *future* life. Our great salvation has already delivered us from the eternal torments of the *second* death (Revelation 20:14; 21:8), from the defeating power of physical infirmities in our *present* bodies, and from the very presence of sickness and pain in the future. In any case, there is no question that God is well able in particular situations right now either to provide direct healing in answer to prayer or sufficient grace to meet whatever physical need we have in a way that honors Him (2 Corinthians 12:7-9). HMM

Tuesday, June 4

Jesus and the Study of Scripture

“And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” (John 7:15)

In the midst of the annual Feast of Tabernacles, “Jesus went up into the temple, and taught” (John 7:14), and the unique caliber of His teaching (literally “indoctrinating”) caused the Jewish scholars there to “marvel.”

Their question on this occasion was how an uneducated man, who had never been taught by the scribes and rabbis, could have acquired such a remarkable understanding of the Holy Scriptures. He had never had formal training in the Word; yet, when He taught, “he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:29).

His answer to their question was amazing: “My doctrine [or ‘teaching’] is not mine, but his that sent me” (John 7:16).

There are two factors at work here. First of all, His working knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures was encyclopedic, acquired in the same way any other student of the Word can acquire it—by diligent and prayerful personal study thereof. He had done this all His life from the time He was a small boy. Remember how He had “asked questions” of the astonished doctors in the temple, how He was “subject unto” His parents, and how He “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man” (Luke 2:46; 51-52). In all of this, He is a perfect human example to us as we also seek to learn the Scriptures and grow in wisdom and in favor with God.

But beyond His human understanding of the Word, of course, was His own innate divine wisdom and authority. He was eternal God as well as perfect man. Thus, He not only has authenticated the former Scriptures and given us an example in their study and use, but He has also conveyed perfectly to us, through His apostles and prophets, the Scriptures of the New Covenant. HMM

Wednesday, June 5

Paul as Our Example

“Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.” (Philippians 4:9)

The apostle Paul many times urged his readers to follow his example in living the Christian life. To the Philippians, Paul said: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Philippians 3:17).

The initial reaction to such exhortations is to think of Paul as arrogant. To the believers in the Corinthian church, he said: “Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me” (1 Corinthians 4:16). To those at Thessalonica, he said: “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you....Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

At the same time, Paul considered himself to be “the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle” (1 Corinthians 15:9). Later he called himself “less than the least of all saints” (Ephesians 3:8), and finally he said that he was even the chief of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15).

In no way was the apostle Paul an egotist. Nevertheless, he knew that his converts needed an example to see, as well as precepts to learn. The Lord Jesus Christ, of course, is our real example (1 Peter 2:21). But by living a life patterned after Christ, Paul could say: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

People need to see Christ in the lives of their Christian leaders. By the grace of God, we also need to live as Christ did, so that when people follow us, they also will be following Christ. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). HMM

Thursday, June 6

A Very Present Help

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah.” (Psalm 46:1-3)

The modifier “very” in this verse is a strong word. God is an *intensively present* helper in time of trouble. “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Those who hold a deistic philosophy argue that God is far away, leaving the earth and its inhabitants to work out their own evolutionary salvation after He first started it going billions of years ago. But they are wrong, for God is right here, right now! “The LORD of hosts is with us” (Psalm 46:11).

There had, indeed, been a time when the earth was removed (literally “the ground was changed”), and even the mountains had been eroded away and washed into the oceans. The waters swelled higher and the mountains quaked until finally, in the words of the apostle Peter, “the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6).

This was the great Flood in the days of Noah—the greatest “trouble” in the world’s history. Even then, God provided a refuge for His people—the Ark that He instructed Noah to build. When the Flood came, “the LORD shut him in,” and throughout the height of the cataclysm, “God remembered Noah, and every living thing” (Genesis 7:16; 8:1). There are great judgments coming on the earth in future days as well (Psalm 46:6-9), when the earth itself will be melted (literally “dissolved,” 2 Peter 3:10).

Again, the Lord’s people in that day can still say: “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:7). From the beginning of creation to the end of the age, God is a very present help to His people. HMM

Friday, June 7

The Christian's 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)

A Christian's words are of transcendent importance, for Jesus has said: “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matthew 12:36). The word “answer” in the text above means more than simply an answer to a question. The Greek word is used 250 times in the New Testament, and in every other instance it is used in a simple narrative sense (such as “he answered saying”). Thus, it refers to ordinary conversation, indicating that every verbal response of a Christian should be gracious and tasteful—never crude, hurtful, or bland.

The Scriptures include many other specifications for a Christian's speech. In the first place, there should not be too much of it! “Study to be quiet, and to do your own business” (1 Thessalonians 4:11). Our words should be carefully chosen, able to be substantiated—“sound speech, that cannot be condemned” (Titus 2:8). People should be able to rely on the truth of what we say. “Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour” (Ephesians 4:25). Furthermore, “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). “But who ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Colossians 3:8). Our words should always be edifying and helpful, wholesome and thoughtful.

But if this seems humanly impossible, remember God is able to tame our tongues, even though we cannot! The key is prayer—earnest and consistent prayer—not just that our speech become innocuous, but that it may edify, testify, and minister grace. HMM

Wondrous Things

“Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” (Psalm 119:18)

Wondrous indeed is the marvelous universe God has created. “Hearken unto this,” we are challenged, “stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God” (Job 37:14). And as we “consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained” (Psalm 8:3), we can only “stand still” in awe at God’s infinite power.

We are even more amazed as we study the intricate complexity of living creatures—especially human beings. “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works” (Psalm 139:14). God’s omniscience is more wondrous than even His omnipotence.

Then there is His miraculous ordering of history for the accomplishment of His purposes. “We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done” (Psalm 78:4).

But even greater than the wondrous world He created or His wondrous works in history are the wonders of God’s written Word, for “thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name” (Psalm 138:2).

Note the testimony of the familiar 19th Psalm: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work.” But then: “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Psalm 19:1, 7). As far as God’s works in history are concerned, God’s Word was completed before history began and will endure after the present world is gone. “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89). “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35).

There are “wondrous things” without end in “thy law,” and we will continue discovering them forever. HMM

Sunday, June 9

The Temple's Silent Construction

“And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building.” (1 Kings 6:7)

Here is a remarkable testimony to the engineering and construction skills of the ancients. In order to erect the magnificent temple of Solomon, every portion was so carefully fabricated, far away from the construction site, that the building could be completely erected in reverent silence.

Furthermore, the stones were not small and rough. “They brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house” (1 Kings 5:17). They were quarried from limestone beds beneath the city and had to be fabricated and brought to the temple site all ready to be laid in place. “And Solomon’s builders and Hiram’s builders did hew them, and the stonesquarers” (1 Kings 5:18).

In both its unique beauty and its silent assemblage, the temple is a striking type of the spiritual temple now being erected by the Holy Spirit. “Now therefore ye are...built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

In this spiritual temple, each new believer is a costly stone, carefully cut from the world’s dark quarry, then silently placed in the growing structure by the Holy Spirit on the foundation of Jesus Christ, “to whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:4-5). “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16). HMM

Inerrancy According to Christ

“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.” (Matthew 5:18)

Here is the commentary of the Lord Jesus on the doctrine of plenary verbal inspiration. Not only were the words of the Bible divinely inspired, but even the very letters! The “jot” was the smallest letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*yod*, the tenth letter). The “tittle” was a small, horn-like appendage that transformed one Hebrew letter into another. Thus, a stronger statement of absolute verbal inspiration than this could hardly be imagined.

Further, the phrase “in no wise” is actually a double negative in Greek. In New Testament Greek it was used for strong emphasis. According to none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, every word—even every letter—of the “law” must be fulfilled. This certainly includes the books of the Pentateuch—including even the often-maligned and distorted opening chapters of Genesis!

He applied the same principle to other parts of Scripture as well. “The scripture cannot be broken,” He said (John 10:35) in the course of an exposition of Psalm 82:6, based on one single word used in the verse, supporting the vital doctrine of His own deity.

It is clear that Christ taught the doctrine of full, verbal inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. It is sad and inexcusable that so many today who call themselves Christians repudiate this vital teaching of the Lord Jesus by rejecting, diluting, or “interpreting” the plain statements of the Word of God. And lest anyone equivocate by suggesting that, since the original writings have all been lost, we no longer can know what the divinely given words may have been, we should remember Christ’s promise: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). HMM

Tuesday, June 11

The Fruit-Bearing Christian

“Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.” (Philippians 4:17)

The apostle Paul here was commending the Christians at Philippi as the only church that had sent an offering to help defray his expenses on his missionary trips. He calls such gifts “fruit” that would abound to their “account” (Greek *logos*, probably better rendered as “testimony”). Thus, God considers gifts of money to scriptural ministries to be like life-giving fruits on a healthy vine.

There are other types of fruits that a Christian life can produce. Paul regarded those he had helped lead to Christ as fruits. He wrote to the Christians at Rome: “I purposed to come unto you...that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles” (Romans 1:13).

Genuine traits of godly character are also called fruits. “For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth” (Ephesians 5:9). The classic passage, outlining the nine-fold fruit produced by the Holy Spirit in the life of a willing Christian, is Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” It is significant that all these attributes constitute one fruit, not nine fruits.

The tremendous importance of fruit-bearing in the Christian life was especially brought out by Christ in His famous discourse on the vine and the branches in John 15:1-16. In these verses, the word “fruit” occurs eight times. First, there is the warning: “Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away” (John 15:2). If there is no fruit (or if the fruit is “corrupt fruit”) in the life, there is no assurance of any life at all.

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit” (John 15:8). To bring forth much fruit, we must abide (that is, “continue steadfastly”) in Christ (John 15:5). HMM

Wednesday, June 12

O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” (1 John 3:1)

The Christian church has a rich heritage in its hymns. Over the years, dear saints of God have framed great Christian doctrines in music, easy to remember and a joy to sing. The unfathomable love of Christ for us is laid out clearly in the first verse of one such hymn, “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus.”

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, vast, unmeasured,
boundless, free!*

*Rolling as a mighty ocean in its fullness over me!
Underneath me, all around me, is the current of Thy love
Leading onward, leading homeward to Thy glorious rest
above!*

Our text reminds us that the love of Christ is a different kind of love than that which we can express or even comprehend. We can only ask, “What manner of love is this?” We know it as grace, unmerited favor, a sweet blessing given to us that we do not deserve.

This love surrounds us, buoying us up and sweeping us along in its current. We have the privilege of returning that love: “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Such love led Him to Calvary and us to eternal life. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

This love will lead us on to glory, where we will spend eternity with the Author of love. There He will continue forever extending His love gifts to us. “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). His love for us is so deep. JDM

Thursday, June 13

O How He Loves You and Me

“That ye...may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17-19)

The theme of the inspiring hymn “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus” is the infinite love Christ displayed for us through His gracious life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection from the grave, followed by His present ministry on our behalf.

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, spread His praise from
shore to shore!*

*How He loveth, ever loveth, changeth never, nevermore!
How He watches o'er His loved ones, died to call them
all His own;*

*How for them He intercedeth, watcheth o'er them from
the throne!*

His love cannot be earned but was freely extended to us. Even greater than that, it was given when we were sinners by choice and nature. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

His love for us never fails and never changes: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). He was willing to die so that our death penalty would be paid and to adopt us into His family. Even now He rejoices over us. “The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing” (Zephaniah 3:17).

He now oversees us from His place at the right hand of His Father, making intercession for us. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). Such love is deep indeed. JDM

Love of Every Love the Best

“And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Ephesians 3:19)

The love of Jesus has been our theme these last two days, following the insightful hymn “O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus.” And deep it is, as many Scriptures attest.

*O the deep, deep love of Jesus, love of every love the best!
'Tis an ocean full of blessing, 'tis a haven giving rest!
O the deep, deep love of Jesus, 'tis a heav'n of heav'ns
to me;
And it lifts me up to glory, for it lifts me up to Thee!*

The depth of His sacrificial love for us transcends knowledge. His love for us overwhelms any love we have for Him or for one another. His nature of true love drives His love for us, even though we are quite unlovely, for “God is love” (1 John 4:8). Our response? “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Romans 8 lists many aspects of the loving work He has done and is still doing for us. We are fully covered by His love. It asks, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Romans 8:35), followed by a carefully worded list of the things that cannot sever our place in His favor, our secure position in Christ. The section closes with the affirmation “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:38-39).

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Corinthians 13:14). JDM

Saturday, June 15

The Watchers

“This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.” (Daniel 4:17)

Who are these mysterious “watchers” who are so concerned that we know “the powers that be are ordained of God” (Romans 13:1), sometimes even including the “basest of men”? They are mentioned in the Bible only here in the fourth chapter of Daniel (see also vv. 13, 23), all three times evidently synonymous with “the holy ones,” beings who come down from heaven. Such phrases could apply only to angels, created to serve the Lord and the “heirs of salvation” (Psalm 103:20; Hebrews 1:14).

“Watchers” is used here in reference to Nebuchadnezzar’s vision and period of insanity. Although it is used nowhere else in the Bible, it occurs frequently in such apocryphal books as Jubilees and Enoch, where it refers both to God’s holy angels and to the fallen angels, who have direct interest in people on Earth as they “watch” them—even on occasion directly controlling events that affect them.

In any case, the Bible does indicate that “the angels desire to look into” the outworking of the gospel in the hearts of men (1 Peter 1:12) and that “unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:10). Children, as well as adult believers, also seem to have guardian angels who “watch” them (Matthew 18:10; Acts 12:9-15).

This is a mysterious subject because we cannot see these “watchers,” but we at least need to know they are there. In fact, we can praise God that “the angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psalm 34:7). HMM

Sunday, June 16

The Glory of the Children

“[The] glory of children are their fathers.” (Proverbs 17:6)

Most Christian men are aware of the familiar exhortation to bring up their children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4) and the warning “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged” (Colossians 3:21). Biblical messages to fathers frequently reflect the very real societal need for family discipline and godly leadership in the home (Proverbs 22:6, 15; Genesis 18:19).

Our text is a bit different. Although the message certainly implies godly leadership, the immediate focus is on the children. Children, we are told, receive “glory” from their fathers! How is this to come about?

Glory, in the biblical sense, centers on the value, the worthiness, or the reputation of the person or event so recognized. For instance, the Scripture teaches that the Lord Jesus “shall come in the glory of his Father” (Matthew 16:27; Mark 8:38; etc.) and that the reputation of God the Father was conferred on Christ Jesus: “For he received from God the Father honour and glory” (2 Peter 1:17).

So, fathers, please learn this critical principle. Your reputation is reflected onto your children. Your behavior in the workplace is assumed to be an indicator of your children’s potential. What you say or do in moments of unguarded or uncontrolled passion will pass on to your children—for good or ill. The common saying “like father, like son” is recognized across time and culture as an accurate measure of human existence.

The Lord insists that “the iniquity of the fathers” will be passed “upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Exodus 34:7). Would it not be far better that your children receive glory from your righteous life than shame (Psalm 89:45) from your iniquity? HMM III

Monday, June 17

Baptism in the Holy Spirit

“For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:13)

This is a definitive verse on one of the great themes of the Bible. The preposition “by” is the Greek *en*, which can take many meanings (by, with, through, etc.) depending on context, but it is most frequently and most naturally rendered simply as “in.” The baptism in one Spirit is the theme of this passage, teaching us that every one of the “brethren” (v. 1)—those who “speaking by the Spirit of God” have acknowledged Jesus to be their Lord (v. 3)—has been “baptized into one body,” the body of Christ Himself.

This baptism is accomplished in the Spirit for every genuine believer, Jew or Gentile, slave or master, male or female, young or old. Furthermore, the passage is actually in the past tense: “[In] one Spirit [were] we all baptized into one body.” This baptism does not take place repeatedly in one’s life, as may be true of the “filling” of the Spirit, but once, at the time of true conversion. There are only seven explicit references in the Bible to the baptism in the Holy Spirit. All except our text are referring to the initial baptizing work of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1). It deals with the ongoing work of the Spirit in all future instances of true conversion to Christ. Since His first baptism of Jewish believers (Acts 2) and then of Gentiles (Acts 11), *all*—both Jews and Gentiles—are baptized in the Spirit into the body of Christ.

Therefore, let true Christians rejoice that the Holy Spirit has placed each of them securely in the body of Christ, united to Him and sharing His resurrection life, with all functioning together through “the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Corinthians 12:6). HMM

Instructing in Meekness

“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.” (2 Timothy 2:24-25)

In his second epistle to young Timothy, the imprisoned Paul admonished him to instruct those who oppose biblical doctrines, especially the gospel. But in verse 16, he said to “shun profane and vain babblings.” On one hand, Timothy was supposed to shun pointless arguments, but on the other, he was to humbly engage and instruct. How are believers supposed to know when to engage and when to disengage?

Paul gave answers in the intervening verses. We disengage when we see that the conversation is pointless. When we enter profane and vain babblings, arguing within their framework, then we “increase unto more ungodliness.” (2 Timothy 2:16). “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2:23).

We engage, however, with those who oppose God’s truth, hoping that “God peradventure will give them repentance” (2:25b). We ready ourselves “for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2:21). Once spiritually prepared, “the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all” (2:24). Paul is concerned not only that believers “rightly [divide] the word of truth” (2:15) but also with the believer’s demeanor and behavior. Why would someone’s arguments be persuasive if their statements aren’t backed by godly character (see 1 Peter 3:15-16)?

Believers are to be “apt [skilled] to teach...in meekness” (our text). Meekness does not mean weakness but power under control. In the context of a conversation, meekness isn’t focused on winning an argument so much as reaching the other person with God’s truth. So, we avoid foolish babblings with some but instruct others skillfully and with meekness. BDT

Wednesday, June 19

Habitual Joy

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3-4)

Does godly thankfulness characterize your heart? Sometimes apathy or complaining will creep into the believer’s soul, causing a spiritual brain fog that robs him of the rich joy of being redeemed. Peter’s words “blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” highlight and honor Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). He is the believer’s source of all hope and joy because it is through Jesus that we can be saved from our sin.

In expressing joy in his salvation and future inheritance, Peter describes God’s “abundant [Greek *polus*] mercy” that has forgiven believers so they may be “begotten” (*anagennēsas*), meaning “to cause to be born again.” God’s mercy meets our misery, and His grace meets our guilt. Because we can do nothing to merit such a magnanimous gift (Ephesians 2:8-9), godly and joyful thankfulness should be the natural consequence of recognizing the extent of this mercy and grace.

Peter also rejoices in the gift of “lively hope” that is given by the physical resurrection of Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:49). “Lively,” also translated as “liveth” or “living” elsewhere, is used five times in 1 Peter (1:3, 23; 2:4-5; 4:5-6) and emphasizes the spiritual life available to us through our living Savior. The resurrected Christ is the foundation of hope for the believer in the inheritance to come—an assurance based solely on the reality of a risen Christ!

Believers have joy “through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement” (Romans 5:11). Are you exulting in the joy of your salvation? CCM

Thursday, June 20

Jesus Christ, Lord over Creation

“Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.” (Colossians 1:15-16)

Darwin’s theory of evolution challenged the biblical account that our Lord Jesus Christ created all things, speaking everything into existence (Hebrews 11:1-3). Many Christians responded by trying to fit evolution into the Bible. This is done despite the fact that theistic selectionism—which believes God used natural selection as the driving force behind creatures’ amazing complexity—isn’t found anywhere in Scripture. Or science, for that matter.

During times of intellectual conflict, the Christian community tends to *only* focus on salvific points of the Christian faith. People justify this approach by saying “secondary issues” such as biblical creation are controversial and shouldn’t be addressed for the sake of Christian unity and getting along with more people.

But today’s church is starving for doctrinal precision. Compromising biblical creation weakens the church, debilitating its witness and impact. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones wrote about the “essential nature” of biblical creation that “these early chapters of Genesis, with their history, play a vital part in the whole doctrine of salvation.”¹

As Christians, we shouldn’t compromise or be silent about the doctrine of creation. We can stand with certainty on the authority and authenticity of God’s Word and duly honor Jesus as the Creator and Lord of all. CCM

1. D. M. Lloyd Jones, *What Is an Evangelical?* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 75-76.

Friday, June 21

How Christ Learned Obedience

“Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.” (Hebrews 5:8)

This is a very difficult verse. The Lord Jesus Christ is the very Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the omniscient God, perfect wisdom and complete truth. How could it be that one who knows all things would have to *learn* anything? Even more particularly, how would He have to learn *obedience*? He was always obedient to His heavenly Father. “I do always those things that please him,” Christ said (John 8:29). He surely did not have to be chastised like a disobedient child in order to learn obedience, as the verse seems on the surface to be telling us.

He was indeed a Son, and He was never disobedient, but He had to *become obedient* through actual experience. He “became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). The “things which he suffered” as the innocent Lamb of God are beyond all human understanding, and His willingness to obey His Father even in this (“nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done”—Luke 22:42) demonstrates the ultimate obedience.

There are many things that one can learn in theory but that are only *really* learned in practice. The Lord Jesus Christ knew all things by omniscience; nevertheless, He had to learn obedience by actual experience. “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things,...to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Hebrews 2:10).

Once having passed this test, He had been “made perfect,” as the succeeding verse assures us, and thus has become “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). No act of obedience that He urges upon us can ever be as difficult as the things He was willing to suffer to provide forgiveness and salvation for us. HMM

Saturday, June 22

The Days of Yore

“For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other; whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it?” (Deuteronomy 4:32)

This challenge was given by Moses to the children of Israel as they were preparing to enter the promised land. It was vital that they cease all complaining and begin to behave in a manner appropriate to their stature as God’s chosen people.

For this they needed to regain a sense of historical perspective, and Moses urged them to study the history of the world since the beginning. Presumably, this would be possible only through studying the book of Genesis—“since the day that God created Adam [same word as ‘man’] upon the earth.”

It is significant that “the days that are past” were implied by Moses to have begun essentially at creation, with no hint of any long geological ages before that. The 25 or more centuries from Adam to Moses had provided enough history to instruct that particular generation about God’s plans for the world, to prepare them for their own key role in their accomplishment, and to appreciate the real meaning of their own lives as they awaited the promised redeemer who was to come someday with salvation.

Now, if the Israelites needed a true historical perspective, we need one today far more. In addition to what they had, we now also have the history of Israel, the first coming of Christ, God’s completed revelation, and the Christian dispensation from which to learn and profit. Our understanding of God and His purposes should be far greater than theirs, so we have much greater responsibility. May God help us to study and believe and understand all that has gone before, as recorded in His Word, so that we also can be prepared to fulfill our own role in God’s great plan of the ages for eternity. HMM

Sunday, June 23

Saints and the Universe

“For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” (Romans 8:19)

This verse says that the creation itself—galaxies, the earth, and everything therein—expects “the manifestation of the sons of God.” What binds the future of the sons of God to the future of the universe?

When Adam sinned, God cursed both mankind and the ground—the dirt from whence he came and the stuff of this universe (v. 20). However, just as we both suffer “slavery to corruption,” we have a common hope for deliverance (v. 21).

Prior verses in Romans 8 identify Christ-followers as “the children of God” (v. 16) who become “joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (v. 17). Christ already received His glorified body. While in that body, “he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9), and He “is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus is in heaven for now but promises to return! Upon Christ’s ascension, the angels said, “This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). After He returns with all His saints (Revelation 19), He will give His followers their own glorified bodies and will make a “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:13).

In this new universe God will “dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:3). So, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22) as it and we together await our glorification. “Wherefore...hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:13). BDT

Monday, June 24

The “Shall Nots” of Scripture

“The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.” (Psalm 34:10)

Many worldly minded people tend to resent the Bible as a book of prohibitions, or “*thou shalt not*”s, as in the Ten Commandments. The fact is, however, that many of God’s most precious promises use the phrase “*shall not*” in a diametrically opposite way, not listing prohibitions but provisions!

As a beautiful example, there is the opening verse of the much-loved 23rd Psalm—“The LORD is my shepherd; I *shall not* want.” Or, as in the words of our text, “they that seek the LORD *shall not* want any good thing.”

There is the great promise of salvation and everlasting life: “He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and *shall not* come into condemnation” (John 5:24). Following salvation, there is the promise of divine guidance. “He that followeth me *shall not* walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). With such assurances, we can rejoice with the psalmist: “The LORD...is at my right hand, I *shall not* be moved;...Though he fall, he *shall not* be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand” (Psalm 16:8; 37:24). No matter how great the trial, the Lord will not leave us. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they *shall not* overflow thee” (Isaiah 43:2).

God’s Word and God’s purposes can never fail. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words *shall not* pass away” (Matthew 24:35). “Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell *shall not* prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). “Sin *shall not* have dominion over you” (Romans 6:14).

We should never resent God’s “negative” commands, for His gracious “*shall not*” promises are far greater! HMM

Tuesday, June 25

A Tree of Life

“She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.” (Proverbs 3:18)

The tree of life in the Garden of Eden was a literal tree, whose marvelous fruit apparently had the medicinal ability to retard the aging process indefinitely, even for men and women under God’s curse (Genesis 3:22-24). This amazing tree will be planted again along the streets and rivers of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:2-3).

The writer of Proverbs used this tree and its health-giving qualities as a symbol of four attributes of a God-centered, spiritual life that can bring blessing to all those touched by it. First of all, true wisdom is like a tree of life, imparting true happiness to all those partaking of it, then guarding it.

Next, “the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30). A life exhibiting genuine righteousness, like one manifesting genuine wisdom, yields wholesome spiritual fruit to those in real contact with it.

The third figure is given in Proverbs 13:12. “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life.” Nothing is more rejuvenating to the spirit than for a dream suddenly to come true after long-continued hope has almost gone. An abiding, confident, always-continuing life of hope is a tree of life.

Finally, “a wholesome tongue is a tree of life” (Proverbs 15:4). “Wholesome” here means “healing.” One can become a veritable tree of life by using the God-given privilege of speech not to complain or criticize, not in vulgarity or foolishness, but to help, encourage, instruct, and comfort.

May God help each of us to be a spiritual tree of life by attaining and demonstrating true wisdom, by living in genuine righteousness, by always maintaining an attitude of confident hope, and by speaking only words of edification that “minister grace unto the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29). HMM

Created by Christ

“And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 3:9)

In the context of this verse, Paul is testifying concerning his divine call to preach the gospel, especially proclaiming God’s great plan to the Gentiles as well as the Jews.

In support of this revolutionary concept, Paul refers to the great fact of creation. All men, and indeed “all things,” had been created by one God. Furthermore, it was by the Lord Jesus Christ that God created all things. Before the revelation of this mystery, the Gentiles had been “without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12). The phrase “without God” (Greek *atheos*, from which we get the word “atheist”) is used only this once in the New Testament, and it indicates plainly the barrenness of all pagan religions. “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Ephesians 2:13).

Thus, by Jesus Christ all things were created, and by Jesus Christ “all things” will be gathered “together in one” in the “dispensation of the fullness of times” (Ephesians 1:10). This is all part of the same “mystery of his will,” according to the preceding verse, Ephesians 1:9. In the last chapter, Paul again refers to this now-revealed “mystery” when he urges the Ephesians to pray that he might be able to “make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19).

Thus, the “gospel of your salvation” (Ephesians 1:13), which we, like Paul, are commanded to make known, is the glorious news that Jesus Christ is both Creator and Consummator of all things and that by His work of salvation, all who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, receive eternal salvation. “All things were created by him,” and He has shed His blood “to reconcile all things unto himself” (Colossians 1:16, 20).
HMM

Thursday, June 27

The Holy Ghost in David

“For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness.” (Psalm 95:7-8)

It is an interesting coincidence that verses 7-11 of Psalm 95 are quoted almost verbatim in verses 7-11 of Hebrews 3. The two writers are both referring, of course, to the 40 years of wandering by the children of Israel in the wilderness.

The Hebrews reference contains an important insight on biblical inspiration. It is introduced by the words “the Holy Ghost saith” (Hebrews 3:7), showing that God was actually the real author of the psalm. Then, the same phrase (“To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation”) is quoted again in Hebrews 3:15, but this time it is introduced merely by “it is said.”

Then, remarkably, it is quoted still a third time (Hebrews 4:7), where it tells us that God was “saying in David” this grave warning. In other words, the same Scripture was attributed both to David and to the Holy Spirit. Perhaps even more significantly, the phrase “it is said” is seen to be equivalent to “God says.” All of this is a clear affirmation of the divine inspiration of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Finally, the fact that the same warning (“Harden not your hearts”) is cited three times in the space of just 19 verses, all quoting the original warning in Psalm 95:8, must mean that God considers it extremely important that we *harden not our hearts!* It is possible that even a child of God can become so involved in doubts concerning God’s Word that he becomes useless to God and thus simply must be allowed to die in a spiritual wilderness, never knowing the great blessings of a life of obedient faith. “The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart” (Psalm 19:8). Our hearts should rejoice at His Word, not be hardened against it. HMM

Paul at the Finish Line

“Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren. The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.” (2 Timothy 4:21-22)

These are the final words of the apostle Paul, written shortly before he was beheaded. Despite his faithfulness and fruitfulness in the Lord’s service, he was now penniless, lonely, and cold. Yet he was not complaining. “I am now ready to be offered....I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (vv. 6-7).

He did yearn to see Timothy, his beloved son in the faith, before he died. “Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me” (v. 9). “Without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy” (1:3-4).

Paul made one especially touching request of Timothy. “The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments” (v. 13). Paul didn’t even have a coat in the cold prison, and winter was approaching. Yet, even under such miserable circumstances, he still desired to keep reading and studying, preparing himself better for any future service the Lord might still have for him.

What a contrast there would be between his present circumstances—abused by his enemies and forsaken even by most of his friends—and the glorious reception awaiting him in the near future! “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day” (v. 8).

Paul has left us a worthy example. He kept the faith, gladly suffered the loss of all things for Christ (Philippians 3:8), and was still studying, witnessing, teaching, encouraging, and exhorting, even to the day of his death. HMM

Saturday, June 29

When God Doesn't Hear

“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear.” (Isaiah 59:1-2)

People often complain that God doesn't hear their prayers, especially when God does not respond in the way they would like. But He can hear, all right! “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?” He even hears our thoughts. “Thou knowest... my thought afar off” (Psalm 94:9; 139:2).

It is not that God *cannot* hear, but it may be that we have not met the conditions for answered prayer so that He *will* hear. Probably the most important of these conditions is obedience to His Word. “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you,” said Jesus, “ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7). But, “if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psalm 66:18). “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts” (James 4:3).

There are other conditions, of course. “Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering” (James 1:6). “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do,” said Jesus (John 14:13). “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).

Even if we do meet all the conditions, however, He may not answer immediately or in the way we prefer, and He might even answer *no*. After all, He knows better than we just what is best for us, and He will see that “all things work together for good” for us if we truly “love God” (Romans 8:28).

But, first of all, we need to check our lives in relation to His Word. Then, “if our heart condemn us not...whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments” (1 John 3:21-22). HMM

Waiting Patiently

“I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.” (Genesis 49:18)

This heartfelt cry of the dying patriarch Israel expressed his lifelong, but still unfulfilled, yearning for the coming of God’s promised Savior. This is the first occurrence in the Bible of the word “salvation” (essentially the same in the Hebrew as “Jesus”). It is also the first occurrence of “waited for,” meaning, essentially, “looked for” or “waited patiently and expectantly for.” This attitude of Jacob (Israel) has been shared by the people of God even to the present day.

Significantly, the first occurrence of the equivalent Greek word in the New Testament expresses the same concern on the part of no less a man than John the Baptist when he inquired expectantly of Jesus: “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” (Matthew 11:3).

Even though He has indeed come, bringing salvation, we still must wait patiently for the complete fulfillment of His promises when He comes again. It was the prayer of Paul that the Lord would “direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ” (2 Thessalonians 3:5).

It is not only believers who wait for “the redemption of our body.” Because of sin, “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now,” and “the earnest expectation of the [creation] waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” when it “shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:23, 22, 19, 21).

Finally, it is significant that the last reference in the Bible to waiting for something once again deals with the same promise. “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 1:21).

It may seem long, but the promise is sure. “Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Hebrews 9:28). HMM

Monday, July 1

The Three Appearings of Christ

“For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” (Hebrews 9:24)

Although we usually think in terms of two appearances of Christ, once at His first coming and again at His second coming, the ninth chapter of Hebrews specifically refers to three “appearings,” each involving a different Greek word. With reference to His first appearing, we read: “Now once in the end of the [age] hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (v. 26). The word used here means “to make manifest.” It is the word used in 1 John 3:5: “He was manifested to take away our sins.”

His second coming is the topic in Hebrews 9:28, where the word means to show oneself visibly. “Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

But there is also a third appearing mentioned in Hebrews 9, and this is the one in our text referring to Christ’s present and perpetual appearance on our behalf in the presence of God in heaven. The word here means “to inform,” referring to His advocacy on our behalf as our “defense attorney,” so to speak. Not only did Christ die for us; not only will He come for us; right now, He is interceding for us!

This work of Christ on our behalf is vitally important, although we do not think of it nearly as much as we do His two other appearings. *This* appearing affects us right now, every day, and is of infinite value. “If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:1-2). “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Hebrews 7:25). HMM

Tuesday, July 2

Trust in the Lord

“Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.” (Psalm 37:3)

Sprinkled throughout this psalm are various pictures that provide the assurance of God’s victory—not only in His eternal plan, but also in and through the lives of His precious saints.

Trust is the most basic of the characteristics of our relationship with the Lord and sets the foundation for all the rest. The Hebrew word carries the meaning of confidence or boldness and is often used in such a way that it would imply we are to “gain support” and “lean on” the One in whom we trust. The expanded definition of trust is contained in Proverbs: “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones” (Proverbs 3:5-8).

But merely having great confidence in the God of creation is not enough. We must “do good” (our text). The entire New Testament book of James is devoted to this theme: “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). “O that there were such an heart in them,” God told Moses, “that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!” (Deuteronomy 5:29).

If we would enjoy the blessings of God, we must embrace the plan of God. If we are to expect the promise that we will “dwell” and “be fed,” then we must submit to the instructions of our Lord, who told us to “seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33). HMM III

Wednesday, July 3

The Heaven of Heavens

“But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1 Kings 8:27)

The term “heaven” is not just a general term for where the souls of the righteous go after death. The Bible actually speaks of the “third heaven,” the realm to which Paul was once temporarily “caught up into paradise” (2 Corinthians 12:4). The term is also applied to the realm of the atmosphere and to the realm of the stars (e.g., Genesis 1:14, 20). In fact, the Hebrew word *shamayim* is actually a plural noun, often rendered “heavens” as well as “heaven.”

The concept of “first heaven,” “second heaven,” and “third heaven” may also have another meaning, depending on context. For example, Peter speaks of “the heavens [which] were of old,” “the heavens...which are now,” and the “new heavens” that God has promised (2 Peter 3:5, 7, 13) in the ages to come. The phrase “heaven of heavens” actually occurs at least six times in the Old Testament.

Presumably, the “heaven of heavens” is where God now has His heavenly throne and to which, after His resurrection, Christ “ascended up far above all heavens” (Ephesians 4:10) to be seated at the right hand of the Father. It is beyond all the stars and galaxies and presumably has no end. It may be synonymous with the third heaven (the extra-biblical literature speaks of a “seventh heaven,” but this idea is not in the Bible).

Someday, however, the heavenly Jerusalem will come “down from God out of heaven” (Revelation 21:2), and “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it” (Revelation 22:3). The heaven of heavens will be on Earth (the new earth) and we also shall be there—with our Lord—forever. Therefore, sing praises “to him that rideth upon the heavens of heavens” (Psalm 68:33). HMM

Thursday, July 4

Ceremony Becoming the Occasion

“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)

“Philadelphia, July 5, 1777. My dear Daughter: Yesterday being the anniversary of American Independence, was celebrated here with a festivity and ceremony becoming the occasion....The thought of taking any notice of this day was not conceived until the second of this month, and it was not mentioned until the third. It was too late to have a sermon, as every one wished, so this must be deferred another year” (John Adams, from *Adams Family Correspondence: June 1776–March 1778*, 274).

John Adams made two observations that should be remembered today. First, the idea of “taking any notice” of the significance of the day was “not conceived” for some time, and second, “every one wished” to hear a sermon rather than hold a celebration. We have come far!

But note the Creator’s idea of independence. The text in Isaiah 61 is what the Lord Jesus quoted in the synagogue in Nazareth as He assumed His public ministry. “This day,” Jesus declared, “is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21). God’s great liberty is of the spirit and of the mind, not merely of the land and the national population. The independence of Christ will heal the brokenhearted. It grants deliverance to the “captives” and new sight to the blind. The liberty of the King of kings and the Creator of the ends of the earth will set at liberty the bruised.

Be grateful and celebrate the wonderful liberty that God has granted the United States. But pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven....For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matthew 6:10, 13). HMM III

Friday, July 5

The Nature of Our Calling

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” (2 Timothy 1:9)

Our “calling” (Greek *klesis*) to follow Christ was not a matter of human decision and certainly was not based on human works, for it was issued in Christ before He even created us. In some inscrutable way, we were a part of His eternal purpose, and it was altogether by His grace. We were “chosen...before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love” (Ephesians 1:4).

Our calling is therefore a most “*holy* calling,” that is, a sacred calling to be consecrated and separated unto God.

It is, moreover, a “*heavenly* calling,” one originated in heaven by our heavenly Father, centered in His divine will and purpose. In the Father’s sight, in Christ Jesus we are nothing less than “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Hebrews 3:1).

We should therefore be able to say with Paul: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the *high* calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:14). The *high* calling is not quite the same as the *holy* calling or the *heavenly* calling, though all are components of one great whole.

The word translated “high” is only so translated this one time. It is the usual word for “up” or “above.” Thus, the prize toward which we press is the “up calling.” It is similar to what is expressed in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, where we are promised that one day all who are in Christ Jesus, dead or living, will be “caught up together,” thereafter to “ever be with the Lord.”

He *has called* us before the world began, He *is calling* us daily to a heavenly walk with the Lord, and He *will call* us up to His eternal presence some day soon. HMM

Kingdom of Priests

“And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.” (Exodus 19:6)

These were the words of God to Israel, even before they received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. As a priest serves as an intermediary between God and men, so this “kingdom of priests” had been called by God to bring God’s Word to man. As a holy nation with such a high calling, its people also should have been holy (that is, consecrated to God) in life and witness. But instead, after almost 2,000 years, God had to lament: “All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Romans 10:21).

A day will come when “all Israel shall be saved” (Romans 11:26), but God has, in the meantime, chosen a new people, in whom “there is neither Jew nor Greek...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). We are now “one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Romans 12:5).

We now have been given the same high privileges long ago given to Israel. We who belong to Christ have been “born again” into the “kingdom of God” (John 3:3), and this is nothing less than a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. Peter said: “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

Not only are we a *holy* priesthood, we are a *royal* priesthood, a kingdom of priest-kings. “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” (v. 9). We, indeed, have a high calling and should devote our lives to showing forth His praises, for He “hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; unto him be glory and dominion for ever and ever” (Revelation 1:6). HMM

Sunday, July 7

Garments of Salvation

“I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” (Isaiah 61:10)

One of the beautiful biblical metaphors of salvation is that of clothing appropriate for coming into God’s presence. Such clothing is not something we ourselves can make or purchase; it must be prepared and provided by God.

Adam and Eve tried to dress themselves in fig leaves, but that could not avail. Their Creator God first had to slay two innocent animals, and then He made “coats of skins and clothed them” (see Genesis 3:7, 21).

So it is today. If we try to come to God dressed in our works of righteousness, we can never make it, for “all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” in the presence of a holy God (Isaiah 64:6). He must provide the clothing. As our text says, “*he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness.*”

In Jesus’ parable of the wedding feast for the king’s son, there was one man who wanted to participate in the feast but who tried to come in his own attire, disdainful of the wedding garment provided by the king for his guests. When the king asked, “How camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” he was speechless (Matthew 22:12) and was bound hand and foot and thrown “into outer darkness” (v. 13).

When “the marriage of the Lamb is come,” His bride must be “arrayed in fine linen, clean and white:...the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:7-8). But this righteousness will be *His*, “for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Ephesians 2:10). Therefore, we are exhorted to “put on thy beautiful garments” (Isaiah 52:1) and be prepared to meet our King. HMM

Monday, July 8

Who Is Faithful?

“Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?” (Proverbs 20:6)

Faithfulness is like a rare and precious gem. It is difficult to find such a gem, though there are many who will offer their virtues as a substitute.

Moses, however, was one such man. “And Moses verily was faithful in all his house” (Hebrews 3:5). So was Abraham. “So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham” (Galatians 3:9). Moses and Abraham were full of faith in God’s Word; therefore, they were faithful to God’s Word. The very word “faithful” means “full of faith.”

God is not impressed with those who boast of themselves and their qualifications or who belittle others. “It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory” (Proverbs 25:27). Actions speak louder than words, and it is better to let one’s works speak for themselves. “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works” (James 2:18). The rare quality of faithfulness—firm and reliable commitment to one’s convictions and responsibilities in accordance with God’s Word and God’s leading—is proved in practice rather than proclamation. May God help us to be faithful servants, for “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Corinthians 4:2). It is quality, not quantity, of service that God measures.

There is one glorious promise regarding faithfulness—not our faithfulness but the faithfulness of our Savior. “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Timothy 2:13). “For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith [literally, ‘faithfulness’] of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be [found] true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:3-4). HMM

Tuesday, July 9

Stand Fast

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold to the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”
(2 Thessalonians 2:15)

Liberals commonly question the authority of the Scriptures on the assumption that they were based on ancient traditions.

However, the word “traditions” itself as used here conveys no such idea. It means simply “that which has been delivered.” Paul used the same word in defining the gospel. “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). Paul did not add or subtract anything to what he had received directly from God. “For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12).

He made the same claim to the Christians at Thessalonica. He had first taught them “by word” when he preached there in person (Acts 17:1-4), then later by “our epistle” in his first letter. Now, in his follow-up letter to them, he was reminding them that, in both instances, he (as an apostle) had communicated to them only those things he had directly received from God by divine revelation. Therefore, it was indeed vital that they should “stand fast, and hold” these great truths “which ye have been taught.” Paul was asserting that God had directly communicated through him the new truths that He wanted them to have.

Before the New Testament was written, much had to be conveyed verbally to the early church through the apostles and prophets. Later, the portions of those teachings that were of permanent application were inscripturated (compare Acts 17:3 with 1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The end result of this marvelous process is the inerrant Bible we have today, and it is this completed revelation of God that we must hold fast. HMM

Wednesday, July 10

Chastening

“Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty.” (Job 5:17)

One of the fascinating paradoxes of Scripture (and of human life) is the oft-repeated principle that true parental love requires appropriate chastening, and chastening rightly received generates blessing and happiness. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs 13:24).

This is effective child psychology, assuming that the chastening is remedial rather than vindictive and is applied in love rather than anger. But the main teaching of such passages goes beyond parental child-training methods to the grand theme of God’s spiritual training of His children for eternity.

This thought is often expressed in the Psalms (94:12, etc.), but it is especially clear in Proverbs. “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Proverbs 3:11-12).

The classic passage on this theme is Hebrews 12:5-11, which begins by quoting the above verses in Proverbs and eventually concludes as follows: “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

We are “sons and daughters” of “the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:18), and it is essential that we be properly trained for our glorious future as “kings and priests unto God” (Revelation 1:6). We must learn to behave in ways appropriate to our high calling as children of the King, and this requires the divine rod at appropriate times. In His closing words to the last of the seven churches, Christ reminds us again: “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent” (Revelation 3:19). HMM

Thursday, July 11

The Throne of Grace

“For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:15-16)

The Lord Jesus Christ is able to help in every time of need for two reasons. First, as the Creator, He is fully able to do anything. Secondly, He has solved once and for all the dilemma of sin that separates us from God’s holiness by paying the price Himself for our salvation.

To do that, He had to become man so He could first overcome temptations such as those to which we succumb. He could not pay the price for man’s sin if He were not a man, nor could He pay it if He were a sinner. He must be a man, but a sinless man—a criterion no other man could satisfy.

Therefore, He was tempted in all points as we are. This does not mean, however, that He felt a real inward temptation to sin. He was “tested” under the most extreme circumstances to which humans could be subjected, and He always passed the test. He could never have failed, because He is also God. But now all men, angels, and devils know that He cannot fail.

Thus, He fully understands every one of our needs, and He is indeed able and willing to help. As we come boldly to receive His amazing grace, we must first “obtain mercy” (v. 16), confessing and receiving forgiveness for our sins (1 John 1:9). Then, we are ready to boldly request grace to help in every other need. Our faithful High Priest has been there before us. He *knows* (not just “knows about”) our problems and is always there to help, waiting for us to come. Since “he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted” and can “save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Hebrews 2:18; 7:25). HMM

Friday, July 12

The World, the Flesh, and the Devil

“This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.” (James 3:15)

True wisdom is “from above” and is “pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (v. 17). False wisdom, on the other hand, may come from the world outside us (“earthly”), the flesh within us (“sensual”), or the powers of darkness tempting us (“devilish”). All such wisdom leads to “envying and strife...confusion and every evil work” (v. 16). Believers, therefore, should be able to recognize the influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The good news is that each divine Person of the triune Godhead is on our side. The Father is opposed to the world, the Spirit to the flesh, and the Son to the devil, and they are well able to give victory.

“If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him....And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof” (1 John 2:15, 17). Thus, to overcome the love of the world, we must cultivate the love of the Father in our hearts and lives.

Similarly, to overcome the desires of the flesh, we should follow the leadings and convictions of the Holy Spirit, “for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other” (Galatians 5:17). Therefore, “walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (v. 16).

The devil and his evil hosts use their own dark powers to tempt and destroy the people of God, but “for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Christ assured Satan’s defeat when He paid for our redemption on the cross. “And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15). HMM

Saturday, July 13

Godless Religion

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

Included in Paul’s graphic description of the “perilous” characteristics of the “last days” (not the church age, since the prophesied last days were still future when he wrote of them in his last epistle, 2 Timothy 3:1-3) is this warning concerning the religious leaders of the last days. They would observe the outward form (church buildings, sacraments, religious services, etc.) of “godliness” (that is, “religion”) but would reject its supernatural aspects. They would desire the trappings of religious professionalism since they would be “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (v. 4).

Such specifications aptly describe the modern world of scientism and liberal theology, which pervades practically all religious denominations and overlaps with all kinds of liberal social movements (women’s liberation, gay rights, “New Age” pantheism, and others). Although these are widely diverse in structure and purpose, they all share one vital feature in common: they reject supernatural Christianity, especially literal creationism. Many liberal preachers give nominal allegiance to the teachings of Christ and the Bible, but they invariably deny the mighty power of God in special creation as well as the great worldwide miracles of the Bible—the Flood, the dispersion, etc.

This prophecy is not given in Scripture simply as a matter of information. It contains a warning urgently needed by Bible-believing Christians who are under pressure today to compromise with humanistic liberals on this great doctrine of God’s creative power. Many have accepted the evolutionary system of “ages geology,” and this is tragic and dangerous. Instead of compromising with evolutionary naturalists and religious liberals, as many evangelicals today are inclined to do, Paul warns: *“From such turn away”!* HMM

King of Tyre

“Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty.” (Ezekiel 28:12)

This prophecy against the King of Tyre is very similar to the prophecy given over a century earlier against the King of Babylon (Isaiah 14:3-28). Both are ostensibly addressed to earthly kings, yet both are impossible to apply to any mere human monarch. In both instances, it becomes obvious that an evil spirit—in fact, none other than Satan himself—had possessed the bodies of these kings. Thus, God, through Ezekiel, is here speaking primarily to Satan.

Satan had been “full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty,” but he became proud instead of thankful. “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground” (Ezekiel 28:17). He had been “the anointed cherub” on “the holy mountain of God” (v. 14), the highest of all the mighty cherubim, covering the very throne of God. But “thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire” (v. 16).

Satan, the covering cherub, had been “created” (v. 13), but he was not content to serve his Creator. When he sinned—desiring God’s throne for himself (Isaiah 14:13)—God cast him out, saying, “Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou was created, till iniquity was found in thee” (Ezekiel 28:15).

Yet, he still refuses to acknowledge God and has since persuaded multitudes of men and women to assume that they, too, can be “as gods” (Genesis 3:5). This belief can only—if they persist—result in their eternal ruin. HMM

Monday, July 15

The True Charisma

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16)

One of the words that has come into wide use (actually misuse) is the word “charisma,” along with its derivative “charismatic.” We speak of a politician as having charisma or a charismatic personality, for example. Another common use of “charismatic” refers to those who practice speaking in tongues. But these are not the true meanings of these words, at least not in terms of their original usage.

This latter usage in particular comes from the inclusion of tongues as one of the “gifts” of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:1, 28). The Greek word is *charisma*. It does not mean “tongues,” and neither does it mean an outgoing and articulate manner. It simply means “gift,” or better, “free gift.” A classic example is Romans 6:23: “The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Charisma, in turn, comes from *charis*, which means “grace” and is usually so translated. For example, in the words of our text, if the “word of Christ dwell[s] in us richly,” we shall be “singing with grace in [our] hearts.” Furthermore, just a few verses further on we are admonished to “let your speech be always with grace” (Colossians 4:6). Then Paul concludes the Colossian epistle with: “Grace be with you. Amen” (v. 18).

Thus, true grace in our *hearts* will produce grace in our *speech*, and the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ will always be with us! This is the true charisma! A truly charismatic person is a *gracious* person—one to whom “God is able to make all grace abound” so that he or she, “always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8). HMM

Tuesday, July 16

Be Truly Converted

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.” (Acts 3:19)

To be “converted” can mean many things. The Greek word simply means to “turn” or “change directions.” Christian conversion, however, refers to turning away from the whole world system and turning to God through Christ. Similarly, to “repent” in the Greek essentially means to “think differently” and, in a Christian context, to change one’s whole thought process from worldly reasoning to spiritual, centered in Christ and the Scriptures. Genuine Christian repentance and conversion result in having one’s “sins...blotted out” and thus true “times of refreshing” from the Lord.

But without real repentance and conversion, there is no salvation. Jesus said: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, 5), and He also said: “Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

There are, sad to say, multitudes of men and women who think they are Christians but are not. This is evidenced by the lack of real change in their thinking and living from the beliefs and practices of the world. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Christ Himself has warned that “many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord,...And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you” (Matthew 7:22-23). Therefore, it behooves all who profess Christ to seriously review their personal belief and behavior in terms of their conformity to the world of men or to the Word of God. As Paul exhorted: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves” (2 Corinthians 13:5). HMM

Wednesday, July 17

Wonderful Things to Come

“But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” (1 Corinthians 2:9)

This fantastic promise refers back to another great promise given by God to His people: “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him” (Isaiah 64:4).

The Old Testament promise applied primarily to the nation of Israel, but its New Testament extension incorporates it in a global promise to *all* who love the Lord of glory, “crucified” by “the princes of this world” (1 Corinthians 2:8), the One who was also the Savior of the world.

Comparison of the two prophetic promises yields three vital truths. First, these things that God has prepared for His loved ones have been in view “since the beginning of the world” and have been revealed in part by the prophets, who have been speaking also “since the world began” (Luke 1:70).

Second, those who “wait for him” in the Old Testament are synonymous with those who “love him” in the New. The apostle Paul joins both themes together when he says: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness ...and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (2 Timothy 4:8).

Finally, we cannot even begin to comprehend the glorious things God has prepared for those who love Him and wait for Him. In some measure, the Spirit later revealed them in part through John’s eyes and ears when he saw “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven” and heard “a great voice out of heaven saying...God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:2-3). Then our eyes shall fully see, and our ears hear, and our hearts understand the fullness of God’s love in Christ. HMM

The Wells of Salvation

“Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.” (Isaiah 12:3)

This beautiful verse is in the midst of a psalm of praise for God’s deliverance of His people “in that day” (v. 4)—the coming day when the Lord shall return to the earth and reign “in the midst of thee” (v. 6). Until “that day” comes, however, we can appropriate its spiritual blessings right now.

The word translated “wells” is more often translated “fountains,” denoting flowing springs of water that never run dry. It is first used at the time of the great Flood when in one “day were all *the fountains* of the great deep broken up” (Genesis 7:11). On *that day*, the primeval fountains provided by God for the perpetual supply of living waters to the inhabitants of the “very good” world He had created were cleaved open, the living waters became lethal waters, and “all that was in the dry land, died” (v. 22).

But one day another fountain was cleaved open. As Jesus died on the cross, “a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water” (John 19:34). At the great Feast of Tabernacles, He had cried: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me...out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37-38).

The blood and water flowed together from the deep fountain opened in the Savior’s side that day, and their cleansing powers became a fountain of life to all who will drink. The waters again became living waters from a fountain that will never run dry, “a pure river of water of life...proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1).

Then, wonder of wonders, there is not just *one* well, for all who believe likewise send forth “rivers of living water,” as with eternal joy, we each share with one another, forever drinking from the never-drying *wells* of salvation! HMM

Friday, July 19

Thy Word Is Settled Forever

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

This is the central verse in the longest chapter in the longest book in the Bible, and it is surely one of the greatest verses in the Bible. It conveys the amazing news that the Word of God (which is the theme of the entire 119th Psalm) has existed from eternity past and will continue to exist forever in the future. It was eternally settled in the mind of God before the world was created, then gradually inscripturated “at sundry times and in divers manners [as God] spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets” (Hebrews 1:1).

Other verses in this psalm likewise stress the eternal validity of God’s words: “The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting....Concerning thy testimonies, I have known of old that thou hast founded them for ever....Thy word is true from the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever” (Psalm 119:144, 152, 160).

In the book of Isaiah appears a magnificent claim: “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8). This contrast is expanded by the apostle Peter: “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23).

To guarantee this great truth beyond any further question, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself made the following tremendous claim: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matthew 24:35). “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled” (Matthew 5:18).

The entire physical universe is literally “passing away,” heading inexorably downhill toward ultimate death—with one exception! The words of our Bible and its glorious promises are eternal and immutable. HMM

Saturday, July 20

Introducing God

“And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land.” (Jonah 1:9)

How should believers introduce God to unbelievers? Scripture gives good examples, like the way Jonah defined his God to pagan idolaters onboard a storm-tossed ship. Jonah’s God, in magnificent and holy distinction from their gods, made the universe and all it contains. They soon observed that He is sovereign over all His creation, including the weather. Stopping the terrible storm required no effort from the Creator. They then “feared the LORD exceedingly” (Jonah 1:16).

In that moment, the crew acknowledged what many idol-worshipping Israelites did not. Thus, Jeremiah had to reintroduce them to “the true God” by saying, “The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, even they shall perish from the earth, and from under these heavens” (Jeremiah 10:10-11). In contrast, the living God “hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion” (v. 12).

King David also encouraged God’s people to introduce God by crediting Him with creation. “Declare his glory among the heathen; his wonders among all people. For the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised: he also is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens” (Psalm 96:3-5). And Paul famously introduced God as the Creator to pagan Gentiles in Acts 14:15 and 17:23-25.

God introduces Himself to all who open to the first page of His Word as He who created the heavens and the earth. Do you know someone to whom you can introduce Jesus as Creator? BDT

Sunday, July 21

Supreme Joy in Sacrificial Service

“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.” (Philippians 2:17-18)

Paul’s entire letter is full of sincere expressions of great joy. In fact, joy is repeated seven times in Philippians, which is more than in any of his other epistles (1:4, 25; 2:2, 17, 18, 29; 4:1). In this context, the word rejoice (*synchairo*) means to “experience joy in conjunction with someone or something else” (Luke 15:6, 9; 1 Corinthians 13:6). Paul calls the Philippians and believers today to live out this joy.

How many of us really experience true joy as we live for Christ? Paul did. As a chained prisoner (Philippians 1:7, 12, 13; 2 Timothy 2:9), he was grateful to sacrificially serve his Lord and continued to tirelessly love all believers throughout the known world (Colossians 1:3, 9; 1 Thessalonians 3:10).

Sadly, the reason so many of us know so little about this kind of joy is because we are loathe to sacrificially serve God in little ways, much less in the ways Paul and his companions did (Philippians 1:1; 2:15, 19; 4:18). Let’s not forget the perfect example of joy and sacrifice modeled by the Creator and Savior of the universe, the Lord Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:5-8).

Believer, what are you sacrificing in your loving service to Christ? What have you said “no” to in order to say “yes” to accomplishing God’s perfect will? Loving and serving God sacrificially will bring you true joy (Romans 12:2; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 10:36). Such joy can only come through our Savior, “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” (1 Peter 1:8). CCM

Monday, July 22

Whom Shall I Fear?

“The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1)

David had more than his share of opposition. His father and older brothers thought little of him. King Saul relentlessly pursued him. His generals oftentimes conspired against him. His own son tried to usurp his throne. If anyone had opportunity to trust God for deliverance, David did.

In this psalm—an anthem of trust—David reveals his special relationship with his God that buoyed him in times of trouble. As we read in our text, his Lord was his light, salvation, and strength, and so He is to us.

The Lord is my *light*. When we walk in His light, we do not stumble. Enemies are not able to hide in the dark and catch us by surprise. He vanquishes the darkness. “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me” (Micah 7:8; see also 1 John 1:5-7).

The Lord is my *salvation*. God delivers His children from physical and spiritual danger, including deliverance from the penalty of sin. “Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name’s sake” (Psalm 79:9).

The Lord is the *strength of my life*. God is our defense, a place of refuge. “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower” (Psalm 18:2).

Even in the face of seemingly overwhelming opposition, we have no need to fear. Our focus should be on the source of deliverance rather than on the problem. “Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD” (Psalm 27:14). JDM

Tuesday, July 23

Moved with Fear

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” (Hebrews 11:7)

Noah was indeed a man of mighty faith, believing God’s word even about “things not seen as yet,” preparing for a worldwide flood in a day when God had never yet even “caused it to rain upon the earth” (Genesis 2:5). Noah was “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Peter 2:5) to an unbelieving world for at least 120 years (Genesis 6:3), “while the ark was a preparing” (1 Peter 3:20), without gaining any converts except his own family.

But why would he have been “moved with fear”? Noah was surely not afraid to die! He had “walked with God” (Genesis 6:9) for 600 years (Genesis 5:32; 7:11) before the Flood, and he was certainly not afraid to die and go to meet the Lord.

Evidently it was for “the saving of his house” that he was afraid, realizing that his own children would soon be engulfed by the awful spirit of unbelief and wickedness that pervaded the antediluvian world if they could not somehow be delivered from it. So he “prepared an ark,” and his house was saved. “Come thou and all thy house into the ark,” said the Lord, “for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation” (Genesis 7:1). Although they could easily have refused, they all chose to follow Noah.

In a like manner today, God speaks to the head of each house: “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). A consistent example of obedient faith set by a godly father and/or mother often results in the children also trusting in the Lord for salvation. Every caring parent should resolve that “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15). HMM

Disciples and Servants

“The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.” (Matthew 10:24)

Note the twofold relation of the believer to the Lord Jesus Christ expressed in this verse. We are His disciples and servants; He is our Master and Lord. Each of the two relationships is vital.

The word for “disciple” means “pupil.” The word “master” is the same as “teacher.” The Lord Jesus, therefore, is our teacher, and He teaches us through His Word—the Holy Scriptures. It is our function to learn His teachings and, of course, to *believe* them. No Christian (one under the authority of Christ) has the right to reject or even to question one of the teachings of His Word (Matthew 5:18-19). The lord-servant relationship goes even further. The word for “servant” is actually “bond slave.” The “lord” of a slave was his owner; the word itself means “supreme ruler” and is the title commonly assigned to God Himself in the New Testament. Thus, if a disciple is to *believe* the word of his master without question, the servant is to *obey* the word of his lord without hesitation.

But the world scoffs at the teachings of God’s Word and will try to persecute those who seek to follow them. The unbelieving world—even the religious world—responded to the teachings of the Master by ridiculing Him, then torturing Him, and finally hanging Him on a tree to die.

Yet we are to go to the same world with the same teachings. “As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). “As thou hast sent me into the world,” He prayed, “even so have I also sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

He does warn us: “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). HMM

Thursday, July 25

All the People

“And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD commanded to Israel.” (Nehemiah 8:1)

That was an amazing congregation there in the street of Jerusalem that came together that day just to hear Ezra read the Bible and explain its teachings. Nehemiah’s previous chapter had just enumerated over 42,000 people who had returned from Babylon to rebuild the city.

Even if “all the people” is not meant to be understood literally but representatively, this was still a very large assemblage. It even included all but the smallest children (Nehemiah 8:2), and they all *stood up* (!) throughout the reading and exposition (Nehemiah 8:5-7), from morning to noon (Nehemiah 8:3).

Presumably all they had was the Pentateuch (tradition says that Ezra, who was doing the reading, eventually compiled the rest of the books with it into the Old Testament canon), but this was enough, and “all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law” (Nehemiah 8:9). Ezra not only read the actual words but also “gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8). He further explained that, although they had been guilty in breaking God’s laws, they had been redeemed, and God was fulfilling all His gracious promises in restoring them to their land. Thus, they had joy as well as grief over their sins.

So should it be today. That is, when God’s Word is simply read and explained, that should be enough to generate both sadness and repentance over sin and also true joy in salvation. Then, as it was to the returning Jewish exiles long ago, “the joy of the LORD” becomes our “strength” for true worship and obedience (Nehemiah 8:10). HMM

No Vision

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.” (Proverbs 29:18)

The “vision” mentioned in this familiar verse is more than just a noble goal; it means a literal revelation from God to His people. It was first used in the sad testimony of 1 Samuel 3:1: “And the word of the LORD was precious [that is, ‘rare and costly’] in those days; there was no open vision.” This was just before the capture of the Ark by the Philistines and the death of the inept prophet Eli.

The word used for “perish” here means “exposed and helpless,” and the glory soon departed from Israel once they had forsaken God’s leadership (1 Samuel 4:21). Our own nation was also founded on God’s written Word (the modern equivalent of the divine “vision”), but the Word has now been almost forgotten, at least in our schools and other public institutions as well as in the daily lives of most of our people. Consequently, “the people” are indeed largely exposed and helpless before the attacks of the wicked one. The terrible warning of Psalm 9:17 hangs over our nation: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”

There is an encouraging exhortation to the believer, however, even if he lives in an apostate nation: “He that keepeth the law, happy is he.” To keep the law means not merely to obey God’s commands, but more precisely, to *guard* His Word! Even if all around us are neglecting or even ridiculing and seeking to destroy the Scriptures, we must defend and obey and proclaim their eternal truth and authority. Even if this should entail opposition and persecution, God assures us that here is the way of blessing and true happiness. “Behold, I come quickly: blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book” (Revelation 22:7). The people who lose God’s Word will perish, but “happy is that people, whose God is the LORD” (Psalm 144:15). HMM

Saturday, July 27

The Transforming Light of Salvation

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Corinthians 4:6)

In this text, Paul points us to the creation account in Genesis, underscoring salvation’s transformation of a newly converted soul. Genesis 1:1 reads, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” And don’t forget the second verse: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” At this point, God’s world was formless and lifeless. But God spoke light into this blank canvas of darkness! Paul understands light’s creation as an instantaneous and supernatural action, comparing the miraculous light of conversion to this. The sinner remains in darkness and is lost until God commands, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). And Jesus, the Light of the world (John 8:12), transforms the dark soul, flooding it with spiritual light “of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (our text).

Note the historical correlation between creation and salvation in Paul’s parallel. It suggests that if one’s salvation is a real event—and it is—then the creation of light by God’s word should be considered a historical event as well. The same God who created all things is the One who died to redeem us from our sins and provide life with Him when we accept His salvation.

Have you been transformed by the miraculous light of our Lord Jesus Christ? If so, know that “the LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1). CCM

Sunday, July 28

Ordinary Matters

“Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Ordinary isn't a quality most people aspire to. Are you discontent with the daily grind of routine? Are you unsatisfied with being a member of an *ordinary* church, having an *ordinary* family, having *ordinary* friends, and working an *ordinary* job? Is there an epic accomplishment that you're seeking, just waiting for God to give His stamp of approval? It's hard to not be swayed by the sirens of worldly success.

But the Lord is pleased with the ordinary work of our hands. Ordinary doesn't necessarily mean mediocre. In fact, Jesus lived His first 30 years in complete obscurity, faithful to His God, family, and friends, and increasing “in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

God can and does bring His children to the fullness of Christ in the unexceptional things of life (Philippians 2:13; Ephesians 4:13). We may not be famous or extraordinary, but it should be enough to know that God values and uses those living obedient and ordinary lives for His glory. “Study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you” (1 Thessalonians 4:11).

Our Lord challenges believers to transform the world by serving Him in both our critical and mundane roles. We need to hold ourselves close to Him in all the routines of life. A renewed appreciation for the *ordinary life* begins with loving our Lord Jesus Christ and expressing that love by obeying His commands found in Scripture. “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:18). CCM

Monday, July 29

The Self Life

“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24)

This despondent cry follows Paul’s disturbing monologue on the inner strife between his two natures (Romans 7:13-24). Here the apostle describes the conflict that goes on in the life of every Christian until the self-life is completely subjugated and the will of Christ reigns supreme. The ascendancy of self is indicated in these verses by the fact that the personal pronouns “I,” “me,” and “my” are used no less than 35 times in verses 15-24 alone as Paul records his inner thoughts and feelings (e.g., “that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I”—v. 15). Such a testimony is pervaded with introspection, relating everything to self instead of to Christ. No wonder the conclusion is so miserable: “O wretched man that I am!”

Unfortunately, this is the status of most Christians whose interests are almost completely self-centered. Most Christian books and sermons are designed to appeal to such personal interests, and the explosive modern growth of Christian professional “counseling” likewise reflects the existence of multitudes of self-centered Christians.

But the happy and useful Christian is the one whose concerns and activities center around others and who earnestly seeks to follow and honor Christ and His Word. And this is exactly the conclusion to which the apostle Paul comes in his melancholy soliloquy. “Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” he cries. Immediately the answer comes: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 7:24-25).

We do still have to battle the old nature, but in Christ we have both the incentive and power to “put off the old man with his deeds” (Colossians 3:9) and to “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). HMM

Tuesday, July 30

Sound Doctrine

“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 1:13)

When Paul wrote to his two young disciples, Timothy and Titus, he stressed again and again the vital importance of maintaining sound doctrine in their churches.

“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome [same word as ‘sound’] words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing” (1 Timothy 6:3-4a; see also 1:10). “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:3). “That he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9). “But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1; also 2:8).

If the great apostle was so concerned that his pastoral disciples guard the doctrinal integrity of their first-century churches, he would surely be even more exercised today. These are times when false doctrines are rampant and when sound (that is “healthy” or “whole”) doctrines are often the object of compromise and distortion or (more commonly) simply ignored, even in evangelical churches.

Paul’s command was to “hold fast the form” of sound words—not only the so-called “spirit” of the words in Scripture but the words themselves.

Such strict guarding of doctrine is vital for the spiritual health of the churches. Furthermore, such doctrinal integrity does not lead to cold orthodoxy, as some would allege, but is centered in the “faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.” It is “the doctrine which is according to godliness” (1 Timothy 6:3). It is doctrine that is not only sound in the faith but also “in charity, in patience” (Titus 2:2).

After all, it is the doctrine of Christ Himself, who is not only “the truth” but also “the way” and “the life” (John 14:6). HMM

Wednesday, July 31

Without the Camp

“And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount.”
(Exodus 19:17)

This is the first of more than 30 references to events that took place outside the camp of the Israelites in the wilderness under Moses. In this first mention, it was “without the camp” that God first met with His people and gave them the Ten Commandments. The first temporary tabernacle was also “pitched...without the camp” (Exodus 33:7).

However, when the regular tabernacle was established, it was placed in the midst of the camp, and the camp was considered holy before the Lord. “For the LORD thy God walketh in the midst of thy camp...therefore shall thy camp be holy” (Deuteronomy 23:14).

Accordingly, anything unclean was commanded to be banned from the camp (vv. 10-13), including even “the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp” (Hebrews 13:11).

Sad to say, however, the camp and the sanctuary did not remain holy, and God, in judgment, finally had to remove it from its place. Before its final removal, however, He whose blood had been foreshadowed by all the sacrifices did come personally to His people “to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (Hebrews 9:26). This sacrifice, however, could no longer be offered in the defiled sanctuary. “Wherefore Jesus also...suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:12).

Now again, as in the beginning, God must meet with His loved ones personally, outside the camp. The organized “camps” of religion generally treat His disciples as misfits, and so, like outcasts, they must seek Him outside the camp. “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (v. 13). HMM

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Thursday, August 1

Know and Walk in Truth

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

Much of modern, self-oriented Christian preaching and writing has tended to downgrade biblical “doctrine” in favor of an emphasis on “love” and “fulfillment,” the “pursuit of happiness,” “sharing and caring,” and other such sentiments. Some popular religious leaders major on “confident living,” “self-improvement,” “personal success,” and the like.

Doctrine is thus downgraded in favor of practice, and “works” are considered more important than the Word. But this type of emphasis places the cart before the horse and can never succeed for very long. “Doctrine” is simply “teaching,” and true teaching must come from God’s infallible Word, whether that teaching relates to great divine truths (creation, atonement, sanctification, etc.) or to the daily Christian walk.

As the apostle Paul reminds us, “evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Corinthians 15:33). “Profane and vain babblings...increase unto more ungodliness” (2 Timothy 2:16). We cannot escape being taught doctrine somewhere. If we will not receive true doctrine from God’s Word, we will inevitably become indoctrinated with the world’s humanistic deceptions, for these impinge upon our thinking continually, from classroom and journal, from television and (unfortunately) sometimes even from the pulpit.

If we are *really* concerned about love and happiness and such things, we must acquire them from the right source, the doctrinal truths of the Word of God. It is knowing and obeying the *commandment*, as our text says, that generates pure love, a faithful heart, and a daily life that supports a clear conscience.

When we “know the truth” (John 8:32), then and then only can we “walk in truth” (3 John 1:4). HMM

Friday, August 2

Jesus Christ Upon This Earth

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” (Job 19:25)

Many decry the injustices of partisan political decisions, revealing our longing for a country with perfect government. Good news—Scripture promises just such a situation. The Lamb of God will reign on Earth one day.

Abraham saw beyond God’s promises of earthly land (e.g., Genesis 15:18) and in faith “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:10). The Lord bids us to keep this future in mind as we pray, “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

And the Bible specifies where God will place His capital. “Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem” (Zechariah 8:3). “And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east” (Zechariah 14:4). “But I say to you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God’s throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King” (Matthew 5:34-35).

“And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God” (Revelation 21:2-3). May our disappointment with our governments’ flaws remind us to anticipate with joy the return of our King to the earth that is His. BDT

Saturday, August 3

The Heart Is Deceitful

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)

Just as in modern languages, ancient Hebrew used the term “heart” to mean the inward motivations that control a person’s words and deeds. According to the prophet Jeremiah, the spiritual heart is so innately wicked and deceptive that one cannot even understand his own heart—but God does!

One urgently needs a new heart, and God promises just that. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). “This is the covenant that I will make with them...saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts” (Hebrews 10:16).

The problem, of course, is heart attitude. In the third chapter of Hebrews, this is illustrated in terms of the attitudes of the children of Israel in the wilderness. First, their hearts had become *hard hearts* through their lack of gratitude, and three times the author warns us to “harden not your hearts” (Hebrews 3:8, 15; 4:7). As a result, they soon acquired *erring hearts*. “They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways” (Hebrews 3:10). Finally, their hearts were *evil hearts*, and God would warn us through them. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).

An evil heart is defined here, in effect, as an unbelieving heart. A heart that refuses to receive and believe the Word of God is a wicked heart, inevitably generating wicked ways and evil doings. But Christ will create a new heart for all who will believe on Him and confess Him as God and Savior. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Romans 10:9-10). HMM

Sunday, August 4

Knowledge of the Truth

“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:3-4)

The phrase “the truth,” referring to a certain vital body of doctrine, is found often in the New Testament, and the text quoted above is one of the most important, indicating as it does that fully understanding “the truth” is contingent on being saved.

The theme of “the truth” is especially emphasized in Paul’s two letters to Timothy, the first reference being in our text. He next points out that, in his capacity as an apostle, he must “speak the truth in Christ,” teaching “in faith and verity” (same word as “truth”—1 Timothy 2:7).

The church is called “the pillar and ground of the truth” (3:15). An attitude of thanksgiving is proper for those who “believe and know the truth” (4:3). On the other hand, those false teachers who teach with selfish motives are “destitute of the truth” (6:5).

In the second epistle, Paul urges believers to be diligent in studying the Scriptures, because they constitute “the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15). Then he warns of teachers “who concerning the truth have erred,” teaching false doctrine and destroying the faith of some (v. 18). Those who are faithful teachers, however, are exhorted to help the unsaved come to “repentance to the acknowledging of the truth” (v. 25).

Then, in his prophetic description of the humanist teachers of the last days, Paul says they will be “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (3:7). This is because they “resist the truth” and “turn away their ears from the truth” (3:8; 4:4). Thus, “the truth” always emphasizes its vital importance in salvation and the Christian life. Most of all, the Lord Jesus said: “I am...the truth” (John 14:6). HMM

Monday, August 5

The Second Coming

“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

It has been observed that this first-written of Paul’s epistles contains more direct references to the second coming of Christ than any of his other writings. Each of its chapters comes to a close with a reference to Christ’s return in relation to some aspect of His great salvation, as applied to our personal lives.

In the first chapter, he speaks of the second coming in relation to *service*, “how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven” (1:9-10).

Then, in the second chapter, Paul speaks of *soul-winning*. “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?” (2:19).

Next, there is an emphasis on *stability*. “To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints” (3:13).

The fourth chapter concludes with perhaps the greatest passage on the second coming in any of the epistles, verses 13-17. All of this is said by Paul to be the basis of our Christian *strength*. “Wherefore comfort [literally ‘strengthen’] one another with these words” (4:18).

Finally, the last chapter concludes with the words of our text, speaking of our eternal *sanctification* as a result of this blessed hope of the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The second coming is thus all-important. It is a practical incentive and enablement for the Christian life, encouraging service, soul-winning, stability, strength, and sanctification, culminating in full and everlasting salvation. HMM

Tuesday, August 6

Response to Prayer

“In the day when I cried thou answeredst me, and strengthenedest me with strength in my soul.” (Psalm 138:3)

God’s responses to our prayers are delivered in two ways: practically, in the circumstances or in the direction, and spiritually, in the “inner man” (Ephesians 3:16).

We are often so focused on the physical or external event for which we are insistently praying that when the answer comes, we fail to receive the full blessing—even if we read the practical answer correctly. Our heavenly Father is committed to providing our needs on Earth (Philippians 4:19; Luke 12:30), but such supply is of minimal significance in the scope of eternity. The good thoughts (Jeremiah 29:11) and the good gifts of God (Luke 11:13) are toward the expected end, the ultimate conformity “to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

While God responds to our physical needs, His heart and His purpose are to fill us “with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). He blesses us “with all spiritual blessings” (Ephesians 1:3) and has chosen us to be “holy and without blame” (Ephesians 1:4). God’s Word is designed to allow us to participate in the “divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). God’s desire in responding to our prayers is this: “That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Colossians 1:9-12).

But please be on notice! This internal and spiritual worship and praise cannot be kept private. The “internal” blessings of God will overflow in godly behavior and visible joy (James 3:13; 1 Peter 1:8). HMM III

Wednesday, August 7

The Designed Creation

“Understand, ye brutish among the people: and ye fools, when will ye be wise? He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?” (Psalm 94:8-9)

The concept of evolution is nothing but brute-like foolishness. If an automobile presupposes an automaker, and a clock implies a clockmaker, surely the infinitely more intricate and complex eyes and ears of living creatures require an eye-maker and an ear-maker! “The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them” (Proverbs 20:12).

The most basic of all scientific laws—the law of cause and effect (no effect greater than its cause)—becomes utmost nonsense if the cosmos is the product of chaos and the universe evolved by chance. “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1).

Every creature, from the single-cell amoebae to the amazing human body, bears the impress of intricate planning and construction. The notion that such complex structures could evolve by random mutations and natural selection is simply a measure of the audacity of human rebellion and the absurdity of humanistic reasoning. Such things never happen in the real world, and there is no real scientific evidence whatever for “vertical” evolution from one kind to a higher kind. The only “evidence” for evolution is the fact that the leaders of intellectualism believe it, and the only reason they believe it is because of their frantic desire to escape God. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22).

The ear did not evolve; it was *planted*. The eye did not happen by chance; it was *formed*. Every wise man and woman will say with the psalmist, “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well” (Psalm 139:14). HMM

Thursday, August 8

Water from the Rock

“Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.” (Exodus 17:6)

This amazing provision of drinking water for the Israelites in the midst of a barren wilderness is surely one of the most remarkable miracles of creation recorded in Scripture. Furthermore, it was not a one-time event but somehow continued to provide water for them during the entire 40 years they spent in the desert. God provided daily water just as He provided their daily bread. “Our fathers...did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:1, 3-4).

The provision was an act of pure grace on God’s part, for even after God created the manna for them, the people were about to stone Moses (Exodus 17:4). But their complaint was really against God, so God “stood before” Moses as he smote the rock at Horeb, and a great spring of water burst forth.

This is the first mention of the word “rock” in Scripture, and it is surely significant that the apostle Paul calls this rock a type of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Just as Moses smote the rock with the same rod of judgment that he used to smite the river in Egypt (Exodus 7:20; 17:5), so Christ had to be “smitten of God” (Isaiah 53:4) because of our sins so that “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John 7:37).

Because our Rock was smitten, the water of everlasting life is now made freely available to all who will drink. The very last invitation of the Bible is: “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). Then, “whosoever drinketh...shall never thirst” (John 4:14). HMM

Friday, August 9

Gracious Strength

“Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 2:1)

As with so many other character attributes, a Christian cannot measure strength as the world does. True strength is not military might or athletic skill or purchasing power. “For... not many mighty...are called: But God hath chosen...the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Corinthians 1:26-27).

A Christian is strong when he or she is a person of gracious character, strong in the grace manifested by Christ in word and deed. “My strength is made perfect in weakness,” the Lord told the apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9), who then prayed that we would also be “strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Colossians 1:11).

But how does one acquire such strength in grace? First of all, it is by the working of the indwelling Holy Spirit in the believer’s life—“strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Ephesians 3:16).

Then it is by spending times of quietness before the Lord in prayer and study. “Their strength is to sit still....in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength” (Isaiah 30:7, 15). Frantic efforts to acquire, by human methods, the power one needs to accomplish a task or to reach a goal will be futile in the end, “but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength” (Isaiah 40:31).

After the people had spent a day before the Lord and His written Word, Nehemiah could assure them that “the joy of the LORD is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10). “Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee,” the psalmist could say (Psalm 84:5). When we acquire our strength from Him, we can confidently claim the ancient promise: “And as thy days, so shall thy strength be” (Deuteronomy 33:25). HMM

Saturday, August 10

John's Creator/Savior

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3)

It is remarkable how many names and titles are associated with Jesus Christ (meaning "anointed Savior") in the first chapter of John's gospel. In verse 9, He is called "the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He is "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" in verse 14 and "the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father" in verse 18. John the Baptist called Him "the Lord" in verse 23, "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" in verse 29, and "the Son of God" in verse 34. The disciples then called Him "Master" in verse 38 and "Messias" in verse 41, as well as "Jesus of Nazareth" in verse 45. Nathanael acknowledged Him as "King of Israel" in verse 49, and Jesus called Himself "the Son of man" in verse 51.

But the very first title ascribed to Him by John, as he introduced his gospel, was simply "the Word" (v. 1), from a word hard to translate in its fullness. In the New Testament, it is rendered "word," "reason," "communication," "doctrine," "speech," and many others. With reference to Christ, it tells us that He is always the One who reveals, speaks for, manifests, explains, and incarnates the heavenly Father.

John 1:1 even takes us back before Genesis 1:1, where we learn that the pre-incarnate Christ created all things (cf. Colossians 1:16). "In the beginning" He was, before He created! All things were made by Him. "By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6).

As the eternal, omnipotent Word of God, the pre-incarnate Christ spoke all things into being. Jesus Christ is the Word; and the Word is God! HMM

Sunday, August 11

The Four “I Wills” of Worship

“I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High.”
(Psalm 9:1-2)

Praising the great “I AM” is the most heavenly of Christian duties. The triumphs of the Redeemer ought to be the triumphs of the redeemed. These two verses shift the worshiper’s attention to the Giver of grace, whose “marvellous works” reflect His greatness. These four “I wills” demonstrate David’s desire to praise God with a sincere heart and emphasize his resolve to praise God publicly. Heartfelt gratitude and praise should always be on the lips of God’s redeemed.

“I will praise” is a Christian’s natural response to who God is and what He’s done for him. He praises God’s great name when he meditates on His unchanging attributes (Psalm 18:49; 22:22; 35:18; 43:4; 71:14; 145:2; 146:2).

“I will tell” of all God’s marvelous works is captured in one Hebrew word (*pele*), used especially in reference to God’s redemptive miracles (Psalm 22:22; 66:16; 106:7, 22; 118:17; 145:6; Hebrews 2:12). Secular writings describe such works figuratively as ones that “take your breath away.”

“I will be glad and rejoice” and *“I will sing praises”* to the Almighty are repeated many times in the Psalms (7:17; 9:2; 30:12; 31:7; 57:9; 59:17; 71:22, 23; 92:1; 101:1; 108:3; 138:1; 144:9). And “O thou most High [*elyon*]” depicts God as the exalted ruler of His creation, always vindicating His children and judging the wicked (Psalm 47:2).

The believer purely worships God when he praises, speaks, rejoices, and sings to the Most High. How great you are, our Lord, and greatly to be praised (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19)! CCM

Monday, August 12

Ark of Salvation

“And 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.” (2 Peter 2:5)

Noah and his family were spared from the floodwaters engulfing an entire world that had been engaged in continuous evil. Genesis 6:5 says, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth.” Noah surely preached a message of coming judgment and promised salvation before the Flood (Romans 10:14). Just imagine him calling for repentance and offering free passage and protection on the Ark while the football-field-sized barge towered behind him—the only hope of being spared from God’s wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

But only Noah’s family of eight chose to board the Ark. God closed the door, and millions outside the protection of this vessel perished in the surging waters and wrathful forces that destroyed every living land creature on Earth except the ones preserved within the Ark (Genesis 7:1-23).

Peter describes this historic event as a picture of someone who is spared from God’s wrath by finding salvation in Christ (1 Peter 3:18-21). When one repents and places faith in Jesus, our Savior becomes a personal “ark” through which one is rescued. Believers are protected from the condemning consequences of all the sins they commit in life (Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27; 9:12). As Paul expounds, “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Romans 5:9-10). CCM

Tuesday, August 13

Crucified with Christ

“And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.” (Galatians 5:24)

Death by crucifixion was surely one of the cruelest and most painful forms of execution ever devised. Yet, the Lord Jesus “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2); He “hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

But just as He sacrificed Himself for us, we are now privileged to offer our “bodies a living sacrifice” to Him (Romans 12:1). This spiritual sacrifice is actually compared to crucifixion. “Our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6).

Crucifixion is not an instantaneous death but is very slow and painful. Just so, the death of a Christian believer to sin does not take place in a moment of special blessing but—as in physical crucifixion—is painful and slow. Nevertheless, it is necessary for a truly effective Christian life.

In the book of Galatians, we are told three times by the apostle Paul that the Christian believer should be following Christ in His crucifixion—in crucifixion to self, to the flesh, and to the world. First, we are to be crucified to the love of self. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Second, we are to be crucified to the flesh, for “they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (our text).

Finally, we should be crucified to the lure of this world. “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Galatians 6:14). HMM

To God Be the Glory

“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth’s sake.” (Psalm 115:1)

One of the great words of the Bible is the word “glory,” and it should be evident that glory belongs to God, not man. Indeed, the very “heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1). Not only do the heavens declare His glory, but “his glory [is] above the heavens” (113:4), and “the glory of the LORD shall endure for ever” (104:31). In heaven the mighty hosts of angels “give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name” (29:2).

It is thus singularly inappropriate for God’s servants on Earth to seek glory for themselves. “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

This Old Testament exhortation is echoed in the New. “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;...That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:27, 29-31).

As our text reminds us, God manifests His glory to us today in both mercy and truth, mercifully saving us in Christ, who is Himself God’s truth (John 14:6). Thus, in Christ “mercy and truth are met together” (Psalm 85:10), and we shall “praise thy name for thy lovingkindness [same word as ‘mercy’] and for thy truth” (Psalm 138:2). HMM

Thursday, August 15

The Order of Melchizedek

“The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:4)

The importance of this intriguing verse is indicated both by the fact that it is the central verse of a great Messianic psalm (quoted at least 12 times in the New Testament) and also because this one verse constitutes one of the main themes of chapters 5–7 of Hebrews, where it is quoted no fewer than five times (Hebrews 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:17, 21) and where Melchizedek himself is mentioned nine times. It refers to the fascinating personage glimpsed briefly in Genesis 14:18-20. Melchizedek (meaning “King of Righteousness”) is said to have been “King of Salem” (or “Peace”), but there is no record, either in secular history or elsewhere in the Bible, that there ever was such a city or earthly king. He was also called the “priest of the most high God” (Hebrews 7:1), and he suddenly appeared, then disappeared as suddenly as he had come.

Commentators mostly have assumed that Melchizedek was the chieftain of a small settlement of which we have no record, but this hardly does justice to the exalted descriptions of him in Scripture. He was obviously greater than Abraham (Hebrews 7:4) and Aaron, the founder of the Levitical priesthood. Furthermore, he was “without father, without mother,... having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually” (Hebrews 7:3). Such language is hardly appropriate merely because no genealogy is recorded.

If one takes the Bible literally, such statements could be true only of God Himself, appearing briefly in the pre-incarnate state of the Second Person as King of all peace and righteousness. Now this same divine Person, “because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Hebrews 7:24-25). HMM

What Christ's Death Meant to Him

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

If one were to ask why Jesus died, the average evangelical would usually say that He died to save us from our sins. It is true that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3), but this is not the whole answer, by any means. Too many Christians think of the death of Christ only in terms of what it means for *them*—not what it meant to *Him*.

Our text says that He died for us and redeemed us from iniquity, not just to keep us from going to hell, but to "purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Paul says: "For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9). He wants a people who will have Him as Lord of their lives. "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;...That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25-27).

"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). "How much more shall the blood of Christ...purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14). Finally, the apostle Peter reminds us that the Lord Jesus Christ "bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness" (1 Peter 2:24) "that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Romans 6:6).

We who have been saved by the redeeming death of Christ for our sins often thank Him for what He has done for us—and we should. But we also should praise Him for what He has thereby done for Himself and then seek always to live in such a way that His holy purpose is accomplished in our lives. HMM

Saturday, August 17

An Approved Workman

*“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)*

Teaching God’s Word of truth properly and effectively is not play; it is hard work! The command to “study” means, literally, to “labor earnestly.” There are far too many unprepared teachers of the Bible today, not even to mention false teachers. “My brethren, be not many masters [that is, ‘don’t many of you try to be teachers’], knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1).

A workman who has presented himself for testing and has then passed the test is an “approved” workman, and he will certainly have spent much time training in his profession before presuming to make application for a job. In this most important of all vocations, it is vital that the Word be “rightly divided,” for if, when the test comes, he cannot do this, he will “be ashamed” for presuming to engage in such a vital occupation without the necessary calling, training, or dedication.

The Lord had to train His disciples before they were ready to start teaching the Word on their own. The apostle Paul also, even though he had already received the finest schooling in Israel, still had to be specially prepared for three years after becoming a Christian before he was ready (Galatians 1:15-24). The equivalent of three years’ full-time study seems a good minimum before one should presume to take on a regular ministry of teaching or preaching the holy Scriptures.

Every Christian should seek to win people to Christ, of course, as soon as he himself meets Christ. He should also begin immediately to search the Scriptures (e.g., the Bereans, in Acts 17). But an “approved workman” needs to be thoroughly taught and to have studied in the Word himself. HMM

So Great Salvation

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” (Hebrews 2:3)

One of the greatest words of the Bible is “salvation,” and one could expound its glories at length. Our salvation is so costly that its price was nothing less than the shed blood of the Son of God. “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,...But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Peter 1:18-19).

Nevertheless, there are only three verses in the New Testament in which the word is preceded by an adjective. These three descriptive terms are, therefore, very significant. The first of these is the one in our text—“so great” salvation. The adjective here is used only one other time in the New Testament, where it is translated “so mighty” (Revelation 16:18), describing a cataclysm so great that every island and mountain will disappear from the earth!

Unlike everything else in our lives, our salvation is unending: “And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9). Salvation is not merely the impartation of a better life in this life; it is everlasting life in the future life, in the presence of its divine “author” (or “cause”).

The third adjective is quite different. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation” (Jude 1:3). Our salvation is also *common*! This same word is applied by Paul to “the common faith” (Titus 1:4). Basically, it means “ordinary.” Thus, despite the infinite and eternal values associated with our great salvation, it is also very common and ordinary! Salvation is for anyone, and whosoever will may come! HMM

Monday, August 19

Delight in the Lord

“Delight thyself also in the LORD: and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” (Psalm 37:4)

Psalm 37 provides cures for the fretting (Hebrew *charah*, “anger”) that comes in a spiritual battle. These emotions explode from the heart of the righteous saint against those who would dare lift up their hand against the Lord.

This beautiful promise and command insists that we luxuriate in our Lord. He is the Lord of inexhaustible riches (Philippians 4:19), and His inexpressible power is at work in His children (Ephesians 3:20).

Isaiah records God’s rhetorical question: “Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness” (Isaiah 55:2). God reminded Israel that the day was coming when they would “be delighted with the abundance of [Jerusalem’s] glory” (Isaiah 66:11).

Jesus also said, “How much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:11).

When we trust the Lord to give us what we need, is it any wonder that He who knows all and owns all will give us the desires of our hearts? If we long for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, why should we marvel when the King of kings grants our desires?

The delight that we have in the work and ministry of the Lord is the key to His answering our “effectual fervent prayer” (James 5:16).

Simply stated, a human heart that is aligned with the beat of the divine heart will receive God’s bountiful answers (Deuteronomy 5:29). HMM III

Tuesday, August 20

Born into God's Family

“Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.” (1 John 3:1)

One of the most motivating truths of the Bible is the doctrine that we become sons of God when we are born again through faith in Christ. God then deals with us as a father does with his beloved children. We should therefore respond as obedient children who love their father.

The little epistle of 1 John has many references to this relationship and our consequent responsibilities. In the first place, “ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (2:29). “Whosoever is born of God doth not [habitually] commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God” (3:9).

Another attribute of our sonship is brotherly love: “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (5:1). “Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God” (4:7). Furthermore, each child of God should have a victorious faith. “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (5:4).

All who are truly sons of God will never lose that holy relationship. “He that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (5:18). This is because “greater is he that is in [us], than he that is in the world” (4:4).

There are many such references in the Bible. All stress that we should reflect the character of the Father in our lives as His children. The glorious, ultimate promise is this: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (3:2). HMM

Wednesday, August 21

From Disobedience to Obedience

“As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” (1 Peter 1:14)

A graphic figure of speech often used in the Bible is the attribution of character traits to parental inheritance.

In our text, those who honor God’s laws are called “obedient children”—a term conveying the same sort of message as “children of light, and the children of the day” (1 Thessalonians 5:5), as well as “children of the kingdom” (Matthew 13:38). In contrast, note Ephesians 5:6: “Because of these things [that is, the sinful practices listed in Ephesians 5:3-5] cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” A definitive passage is 1 John 3:10: “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.”

Those who are “by nature the children of wrath” (Ephesians 2:3) can, of course, become children of God by the new birth. This becomes the greatest of all incentives toward a godly life. The biblical terms “regeneration” and “born again” are widely misused today, but they represent wonderful, life-changing realities: “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Ephesians 5:8).

Therefore, as in our text, we must no longer “fashion” ourselves according to our former lusts but according to our new life. “Be not conformed [same Greek word as ‘fashioned’] to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). No longer in darkness and ignorance, we now “have light” as the “children of light” (John 12:36) and the “mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16) as children of wisdom (Matthew 11:19). We now have the very highest of all callings as children of God, and we must “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Ephesians 4:1). HMM

Thursday, August 22

The Rock of Offense

“Give glory to the LORD your God, before he cause darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.” (Jeremiah 13:16)

The figurative representations of Christ as the foundation rock of the great spiritual house of God (Matthew 16:18; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6) and also as the water-yielding rock of sustenance in the wilderness (1 Corinthians 10:4) are two of the great symbols of the Bible.

But for those who reject Him, He becomes “a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense....And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken” (Isaiah 8:14-15).

Not only will the stone cause such a one to stumble, but Jesus said, “And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matthew 21:44). This figure is taken from the fall of the great image in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. “Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet...and brake them to pieces” (Daniel 2:34). All the kingdoms of the world were represented in the image, but “the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth” (Daniel 2:35).

“Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient” (1 Peter 2:7-8).

Thus, the stone of stumbling, which is Christ, is also the Word, and it is deadly dangerous to stumble over the holy Scriptures. One should give glory to God before darkness falls and he stumbles upon the dark mountain in the shadow of death. HMM

Friday, August 23

Dead to Sin—Alive unto God

“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:19-20)

One of the greatest doctrinal truths of the Bible is that the Christian life is one of victory over sin. The law of God has condemned us as lawbreakers (James 2:10), but Christ died for our sins, and “ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ” (Romans 7:4).

We *should* live in victory over sin, but somehow we still stumble. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” The remedy for such lapses is at hand, of course. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

Nevertheless, if Christ is really living in us by His Spirit, if we have *really* been born again, then we *cannot continue* to live in sin. “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Romans 6:2). “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin” (vv. 6-7).

The secret to making this doctrine practical reality in our lives is simply the motivation of gratitude. In the words of our text, “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”

We already have the necessary resources: forgiveness, freedom from guilt, eternal life, and the indwelling Spirit of Christ. We must simply avail ourselves of His power, because He loved us and saved us. “Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11). HMM

Saturday, August 24

The Wisdom of God

“And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.” (1 Kings 3:28)

The “wisdom of God,” as attributed to Solomon, is an awesome concept, because God Himself is omniscient. Apparently Solomon was given a greater share of the divine wisdom than any others of his generation—probably more than most of any generation.

God also gave him “largeness of heart” (1 Kings 4:29). Not only did he build and effectively rule a great kingdom, but “he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five” (1 Kings 4:32). Included in these, of course, were three divinely inspired books (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon), which are now in our Bibles.

Furthermore, he was a scientist, for “he spake of trees,... of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes” (1 Kings 4:33-34).

Sadly, in his old age, he also acquired a goodly portion of “the wisdom of this world” (1 Corinthians 2:6) that must “come to nought” and which eventually led to a loss of part of his kingdom.

The phrase “the wisdom of God” occurs six other times in Scripture (Ezra 7:25; Luke 11:49; 1 Corinthians 1:21, 24; 2:7; Ephesians 3:10). In the Corinthian passages, the eternal divine wisdom is contrasted with the very temporal and often misguided wisdom of man.

In Ephesians 3:10 is found the remarkable revelation that the angels (who themselves have tremendous wisdom—note 2 Samuel 14:20) are themselves being taught “the manifold wisdom of God.” And these instructions are conveyed “by the church”—that is, by the amazing way in which God has created and redeemed man for eternal fellowship with Himself. HMM

Sunday, August 25

Only Christ Was Sinless

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (1 John 1:8)

Here John is writing to Christians, and his epistle is full of exhortations to the Christian to purge sin from his life, with grave warnings to any who do not. Yet, he also says that for a Christian to claim sinless perfection is self-deception. “If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us” (1 John 1:10).

Only by Jesus Christ Himself could such claims be truly made. The greatest theologian, Paul, said concerning Christ that He “knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21). His closest friends, Peter and John, said that He “did no sin” (1 Peter 2:22) and that in Him is no sin (1 John 3:5). His betrayer, Judas, said, “I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Matthew 27:4); His condemning judge, Pilate, said, “I find in him no fault at all” (John 18:38); and His executioner said, “This was a righteous man” (Luke 23:47). Christ Himself claimed human perfection: “For I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29).

Jesus Christ alone was sinlessly perfect in His human life, and it was because of this that He could die for our sins. It is arrogant for one of us to claim a state of perfection, thus leading such a person into repeated assertions of boasting and self-justification, trying to explain why apparently sinful behavior is not really sinful. Even Paul himself acknowledged: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect” (Philippians 3:12).

But between these two key verses in John’s epistle, he gives us the moment-by-moment remedy for sin in a godly believer’s life: “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 blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). HMM

Monday, August 26

Salvation Through the Word

“And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the book of the law, that he rent his clothes.” (2 Kings 22:11)

This experience of Judah’s good King Josiah illustrates the convicting power of the Scriptures and emphasizes the essential importance of the revealed Word of God in the process of repentance, forgiveness, and salvation. It is the Word of God that brings conviction of one’s need of salvation, and this is the indispensable first step leading to salvation. “For by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

It is also through the Scriptures that one comes to an understanding of salvation: “The holy scriptures...are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15). Furthermore, it is the Word that generates saving faith: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

Finally, the very miracle of regeneration, transforming a lost soul into a born-again child of God, is accomplished by the Holy Spirit on the basis of saving faith in Christ (as revealed in Scripture) through the Word. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth” (James 1:18). “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23).

The result of King Josiah’s reading of the Word was that he “made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep his commandments” (2 Kings 23:3).

In view of the transcendent importance of God’s Word in every phase of the process of salvation, it is no wonder that the apostle Paul’s great command, just before his martyrdom and just after his tremendous assertion of the full inspiration of Scripture and its sufficiency for every need (2 Timothy 3:15-17), was simply “preach the word” (2 Timothy 4:2). Not just preach, but preach the Word! HMM

Tuesday, August 27

Whosoever Will May Come

“And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.” (Joel 2:32)

“God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). Yet in the above “whosoever” passage of the Old Testament, it is clear that those who “call on the name of the LORD” were the same as “the remnant whom the LORD shall call.” Those who call *on* the Lord have first been called *by* the Lord. He accepts all those who call on Him from every nation, but no doubt their geographical location to a large extent determines whether they will even hear of Him, and “how then shall they call on him...of whom they have not heard?” (Romans 10:14).

Theologians of great intellect have wrestled with these questions for centuries without resolving them, at least to the satisfaction of those of different mental persuasion. On the practical level, however, the Holy Spirit led Peter to quote this passage in his great sermon on the Day of Pentecost: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).

Peter was speaking only to Jews, but they had assembled at Jerusalem “out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). Then Paul made it forever plain that “whosoever” applied to everyone when he also quoted Joel. “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:12-13). The Lord Jesus Christ Himself, on the very last page of Scripture, says: “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). So, whosoever will may come! One can contemplate later, with deep thanksgiving, the mysteries of the divine call, but first he must come, and if he so wills, he may! HMM

Temptation's Threefold Nature

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.” (Genesis 3:6)

Satan was so successful with his first temptation when he persuaded Adam and Eve to rebel against God's Word in the Garden of Eden that he has been using the same technique ever since. By this threefold temptation, he appeals to the body, soul, and spirit. He first appeals to whatever fleshly appetites a person may have (“good for food”), then to his emotional responses (“pleasant to the eyes”), and finally to his spiritual pride (“make one wise”).

John later would call these desires “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). James identifies them as “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15).

Satan even brought the same three temptations to bear on Christ Himself in the wilderness: “If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread” (Matthew 4:3). That is, “satisfy your physical hunger.” “Cast thyself down” from the pinnacle of the temple, thus enjoying the exhilarating feeling of being borne up by angels (Matthew 4:5-6). “All these things I will give thee” without your going to the cross, Satan taunted (Matthew 4:9).

Christ, however, stood the test, in each case citing an appropriate verse of Scripture to gain the victory. Now, when we are tempted, we can draw on His strength and follow His example. “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him” (James 1:12). God “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). HMM

Thursday, August 29

Life's Uncertainties

“Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5)

Many times along life's way we face uncertainties, opposition, and even doubt. When we do, it is helpful to recognize that those who lived with Christ when He was here on Earth faced the same perplexities. His answers and assurances to them in John 14 are meant for us as well.

“Let not your heart be troubled,” He said (John 14:1)—an emphatic command that could be rendered “Don't continue to be troubled.” The solution: “Ye believe in God, believe also in me.” We believe God can supply all the answers to our troubles. But Christ is God! He is the solution. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6) and is the *only* solution, for “no man cometh unto the Father, but by [Him].”

He is the way. “In my Father's house are many mansionsI go to prepare a place for you. And...I will come again, and receive you unto myself” (14:2-3). Whatever else may befall us, our destiny is sure. His reputation is at stake, for He has promised a place in the Father's house.

He is the truth. Peter had just been informed of his coming denial (13:38), that he would openly assert a lie. Jesus said He is “the truth.” “The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but of the Father that dwelleth in me” (14:10). Words and thoughts not in accordance with His are not “truth,” we can be sure of that.

He is the life. Speaking of His imminent death, Christ said, “Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards” (13:36), indicating their own eventual persecution and martyrdom. Yet their ultimate victory, as well as comfort (14:16-18), were assured.

How can those things be? “Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name,” Christ said, “that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (14:13). JDM

Friday, August 30

The Believer's Judgment

“For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Peter 4:17)

There is a terrible day of judgment coming for those who reject Christ, but for those who do believe the gospel and trust the Lord Jesus for salvation, “there is therefore now no condemnation [i.e., judgment]” (Romans 8:1). Yet, our text tells us that judgment actually *begins* with those who obey the gospel! This apparent contradiction vanishes when one realizes that it is merely for the purpose of preparing those who are already saved to serve Him in eternity.

When a believer sins, he should judge and confess that sin. “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Corinthians 11:31), and God will forgive (1 John 1:9). If he does not, however, the next phase of judgment is the chastening of God. “But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32). The classic passage on the believer’s chastening (Hebrews 12:5-11) concludes with the assurance that its purpose is to yield “the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Hebrews 12:11).

But when such chastening fails to work, the next judgment may even be physical death. “There is sin unto death” (1 John 5:16). “To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Finally, all Christians must “appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10), where “every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). There, some “shall suffer loss.” Nevertheless, each person at *this* judgment “shall be saved” (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). But, as our text continues, “if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:18). HMM

Saturday, August 31

The Glory of the Lord

“So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God.” (2 Chronicles 5:14)

With the coming of the Shekinah glory cloud into the great house, God showed His acceptance of Solomon’s beautiful temple as His symbolic earthly dwelling place. This had happened once before in the wilderness. “Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:34).

But as the glory once departed when the Ark of the Covenant was taken from the tabernacle by the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:22), so it later also departed when Solomon’s temple was plundered by the Babylonians and the people carried into exile (2 Chronicles 36:17-20; Ezekiel 10:18; 11:23).

It returned for a time when “the Word was made flesh, and dwelt [literally, ‘tabernacled’] among us, (and we beheld his glory),” at least in a spiritual sense (John 1:14). On one occasion, Christ’s glory shone through in a physical sense: “And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and...they saw his glory” (Luke 9:29-32) on the Mount of the Transfiguration.

There is also a great day coming when the ascended Lord will return with His heavenly temple, “coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30), even as “the glory of the Lord shone round about them” (Luke 2:9) at His first coming. His glory will be present forever when the heavenly tabernacle, the New Jerusalem, comes to Earth (Revelation 21:3-10), “having the glory of God” (v. 11).

In this present age, the body of each believer “is the temple of the Holy Ghost,” and he must “therefore glorify God in [his] body” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). “For God...hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6). HMM



P. O. Box 59029
Dallas, Texas 75229
800.337.0375
ICR.org

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