

Eleventh Annual  
**TRUTH IN LOVE**  
LECTURESHIP

Theme:

**“My Lord  
And  
My God”**

•• John 20:28 ••



*May 16-20, 2001*

PAUL SAIN, DIRECTOR

Hosted By The  
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## INTRODUCTION

Our society has been bombarded with so many false claims and intentionally misleading testimonies that many people find it difficult to believe anything they see or hear. Our previous president lied to us. Advertisers make false claims such as, *"Eat what you want, no exercising, and lose thirty pounds in thirty days."* Televangelists, fake healers and religious con artists have linked Christianity to doubt and corruption. Is it any wonder people are so skeptical?

As tragic as all of this may be, it is not an insurmountable problem, nor a new one. Nearly two thousand years ago fear and unbelief plagued the religious community. The Gentiles had their pagan false gods, complete with deviant and vile practices such as fornication and human sacrifices. The children of Israel were not much better. The once great nation of God was now being led by power hungry hypocrites who would frequently *"bend"* the laws to their liking (Mark 7:1-23). Even among the followers of Jesus there was doubt. Jesus had just been crucified, His body was in a tomb guarded by Roman soldiers and His disciples were huddled together in seclusion trying to decide what they would do without Him. His closest followers had become so skeptical that they refused to believe He was resurrected from the dead even when their fellow disciples told them (Luke 24). It took the Lord sitting down with them and eating a meal to convince them He truly was resurrected.

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. The other

disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed (John 20:24-29).

All of their doubts, fears and unbelief could have been removed if they had only had faith, and *“faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Rom. 10:17). The Lord was disappointed because they did not remember and seek comfort in the word of God so He, *“upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart”* (Mark 16:14). While on the road to Emmaus He said to two of His disciples,

O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? (Luke 24:25-26).

And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:27).

In addition to the words of Moses and the prophets concerning His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus Himself told them what was going to happen.

For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be

three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40).

As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again... No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father (John 10:15,17-18).

There was no excuse for them not to believe that He would be resurrected because they had the word of God.

Skepticism and unbelief can be overcome today in the same way Jesus defeated it after His resurrection, by preaching the word of God. Jesus is still both Lord and God of all, despite the fact that most people do not recognize Him as such. The sermons delivered at the **11th Annual Truth In Love Lectureship** were intended to eliminate doubt by preaching the word of God. This book is a written compilation of the material presented during the lectureship. Our prayer is that this volume will help you overcome any doubts and fears you may have and give you the courage to say that Jesus is "*My Lord And My God.*"

~ Brandon Britton

# DEDICATION

Young people are often viewed as the restless, troublesome, sinful, rebellious generation. While no doubt there are some who have rejected God and indeed do turn to worldly actions, may I take this opportunity to speak words of appreciation for our young people who are truly *“some of the best anywhere!”*



Our precious young ones have not rejected the Bible as God’s inspired Word ~ instead they are busy learning, memorizing and applying it to their lives.



These special ones have not ceased to worship our Heavenly Father ~ but rather they regularly attend worship and participate in praise to Almighty God. Our

treasured youth have not always lived perfect sinless lives (none are able to do this) ~ but they realize they

can do *“the best they can do”* in conforming to the Father’s will (Matt. 7:21) and be acceptable to Him. Our prized examples are not arrogant, selfish,



boastful, or self-centered ~ but they are humble in the sight of God and their fellowman.

In view of our love and deep respect for youth; realizing they are tempted and bombarded on every hand; and in an attempt to express our sincere encouragement to each one personally ~ this volume of the **Truth In Love Lectureship** is lovingly dedicated to our fine and outstanding young ones.



**Our frequent and fervent prayers for each of you:** May it always be your desire and goal to live according to the will of the Creator, our Heavenly Father. May you *"keep on keeping on"* in living godly and righteous lives. May you diligently continue your reading, learning and obeying the Word of God.

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*“My Lord And  
My God”*



*John 20:28*

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.....

*John 20:28*



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## Chapter 1

# “My Lord And My God”

*Dave Miller*



Dave has been faithfully preaching the gospel over thirty years ~ He has earned various degrees (B.A., M.A., and Ph.D) from Texas Tech, Harding Graduate and Southern Illinois Universities ~ He serves as director of the Brown Trail School of Preaching in the Ft. Worth, Texas area ~ Author of **Singing and New Testament Worship** and **Piloting The Strait** ~ Deborah and Dave have four children and two grandchildren.

Apparently, God gave us four separate accounts of Jesus' life on earth in order to verify and accentuate four distinct features of His person as well as to tailor the message to four different ethnic groups. Matthew, a Jewish tax collector writing to Jews, stressed the regal nature of the Christ of the Scriptures. He demonstrated that Jesus of Nazareth was, in fact, the Messiah King of the Old Testament who came to establish the long-awaited kingdom.

Mark, on the other hand, writing a much shorter account, addressed himself to a Roman audience who were geared to respect power. Jesus possessed authority and power—from His miraculous ability (1:21-3:12) to His power over death itself (ch. 16; cf. 14:62). But His real power lay in His purpose for coming into the world—“to serve and to give His life a ransom for many” (10:45).

Luke wrote to a largely Greek audience, specifically to Theophilus. He emphasized Jesus'

humanity. He helps us to recognize that Jesus has “*been there, done that.*” Jesus has experienced the stress and strain of physical life on earth.

For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin (Heb. 4:15).

He was fully immersed in humanness and, hence, has traveled the same earthly path that we must travel.

### **THE ESSENCE OF JOHN: SEVEN SIGNS**

John is unique from the other three gospel writers. Writing perhaps to an international audience, the apostle possessed the singular aim of proving the divinity of Jesus. This goal is explicitly stated near the end of the book:

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name (John 20:30-31).

The key term that John uses throughout the book is the word “*sign*” – used seventeen times. Unlike the words “*wonder*” or “*miracle*,” “*sign*” refers to a supernatural action that is designed to point to something beyond itself. John selected seven (the perfect number) signs that verify the divine identity of Jesus.

Interestingly, John numbered the first two of the seven signs so that we do not miss what he was doing structurally. After recording the instantaneous

changing of water into fresh grape juice at the wedding in Cana, he wrote, "*This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee*" (2:11). And lest we miss the point of his treatise, he added, "*and manifested His glory.*" The sign that Jesus performed demonstrated His deity! Then when John recorded the second of seven signs, he flagged that one as well by saying, "*This again is the second sign that Jesus did...*" (4:54). When one continues to read the book, noting a total of seven signs hand-picked by John (i.e., the Holy Spirit) to prove Jesus' deity, one cannot help but recognize the significance of the thematic statement—"*And truly Jesus did many other signs...*" (20:30).

The seven signs that John incorporated into his evidentiary document included the turning of water into fresh juice (2:1-11), the curing of the nobleman's son (4:43-54), the healing of the paralytic (5:1-9), the feeding of the multitude (6:5-13), walking on water (6:16-21), restoring sight to the man born blind (9:1-7), and Lazarus raised from the dead (11:1-44). These seven signs represent a variety of circumstances and conditions that fully document the divinity of the one who performed them.

### **"I AM"**

Additional indicators are found in John's book. John records the famous "*I Am*" statements uttered by Jesus—again, seven of them—that spotlight Jesus' deity. Jesus declared, "*I am the Bread of Life*" (6:35); "*I am the Light of the world*" (8:12); "*I am the Door*" (10:9); "*I am the Good Shepherd*" (10:14); "*I am the Resurrection*



*and the Life*” (11:25); “*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*” (14:6); and “*I am the Vine*” (15:5). Every single one of these declarations can only be said of God. No mere human can claim to be *the Way*! No mere human can assert that he or she is *the Light*! These claims go straight to the fact that Jesus was claiming to be God! What is more, they bear a striking resemblance to the “*I Am*” statements found elsewhere in the book that, in turn, are to be linked with Exodus 3:14.

When Jesus engaged the Samaritan woman in conversation at the water well, she affirmed her belief in the coming Messiah/Christ. Jesus announced to her: “*I who speak to you Am*” (4:26). Speaking to temple Jews, Jesus declared, “*for if you do not believe that I Am, you will die in your sins*” (8:24). Then He added, “*When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I Am*” (8:28). Continuing His remarks to the same group, He maintained, “*Before Abraham was, I Am*” (8:58). They knew He was claiming to be God, affiliating Himself with the I Am of the Old Testament. Accordingly, “*they took up stones to throw at Him*” (8:59). After washing the feet of His disciples, He predicted Judas’ betrayal and stated, “*Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I Am*” (13:19). John was specifically pinpointing the occasions where Jesus claimed to be God to underscore the theme of his book.

He likewise records several appellations that further identify Jesus’ divinity. In his first verse, he refers to Jesus as “*the Word*” who was with God and who, in fact, was “*God*” (1:1). He quotes John the

Immerser as referring to Jesus as "*the Lamb of God*" (1:29). Andrew called Him "*the Messiah*" or "*Christ*" (1:41). Nathaniel declared Him to be "*the Son of God*" and "*the King of Israel*" (1:49). Jesus referred to Himself as "*the Son of Man*" (1:51). The Samaritans were convinced:

Now we believe...for we have heard for ourselves and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world (4:42).

Leave it to Thomas to offer the ultimate declaration: "*My Lord and My God*" (20:28).

### WORDS THAT CLARIFY

In addition to the key term of the book ("*sign*"), several other words are used to bolster and accentuate the point of John. The word "*work*" is used twenty-five times and is essentially a parallel term to "*sign*." The "*works*" in John are typically miraculous acts that verify Jesus' divinity. The "*signs*" and "*works*" that Jesus performed—like all miracles in the Bible—substantiated and confirmed the oral words/claims of Jesus (Mark 16:20; Acts 4:9-20; 14:3; Heb. 2:3-4; et al.).

Forms of the word "*truth*" are used forty times. The central truth that can and must be known is that Jesus is divine. However, the divine identity of Jesus of necessity means that everything Jesus enjoins upon people is "*truth*" that must be believed and obeyed. Jesus said, "*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (8:31-32). He prayed to the Father,

*“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth”* (17:17).

The word “*know*” is used eighty-seven times in John. To “*know*” something is to have such certainty that one cannot possibly be wrong. Unlike the agnosticism that reigns supreme in the world around us—even among those who claim to be Christian—John shows us that we can have certainty about the central doctrine of Christianity. We can *know* that Jesus is divine and we can know what He expects us to do to be pleasing to Him.

Another key word is “*believe*,” used fifty-three times in the book. Of course, the faith that John refers to is not a mere mental affirmation concerning Jesus’ person. “*Believe*” in John does not refer to “*accepting Jesus as your personal savior*.” The belief that John sets forth as essential to being acceptable to God is a faith that conforms to the words of Jesus.

Many Jews of Jesus’ day believed on Him, but they were unacceptable to Him because their faith was not coupled with obedience (8:30-31,44; 12:42). Many people abandoned their pursuit of Jesus when He insisted, “*The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life*” (6:63). Peter rightly said, “*You have the words of eternal life*” (6:68). In other words, Jesus has given a body of information that must be understood and obeyed. One is not a genuine “*believer*” unless conviction regarding the person of Jesus is accompanied by compliance with His instructions.

Putting all of these key words together, we arrive at a succinct summary of what the book of John

is about. The *signs* and *works* that Jesus did make it possible for people to *know* the *truth* that Jesus is divine. This realization should lead them to *believe* (obey) Him. Indeed, since Jesus proved His divine identity by the signs that He performed, refusal to believe in and obey Him is inexcusable.

As we read and study the book of John, our appreciation for who Jesus truly is deepens. Not only do we become more acquainted with His personality, we are awed by His Godhood. We are struck by His divine nature and attributes. We marvel at His willingness to condescend to humanity in order to draw us to Him. We are thrilled at the prospects of being received by Him. *“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory”* (1:14).

### **THE ULTIMATE REALIZATION**

John, by the Holy Spirit, crafted his gospel record to build with increasing intensity and to culminate in a magnificent climax. The seventh and final sign that John conveys involves the fantastic achievement of raising a dead man whose body had commenced decomposition (ch. 11). Then John proceeds to wind down His record by reporting the final events of the Lord’s life on earth—His anointing and triumphal entry (ch. 12), His effort to prepare the apostles for their impending roles (chs. 13-17), and then the events that led to His atoning work upon the cross (chs. 18-20). But He does not bring His marvelous narrative to its grand climax with the reporting of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. It is not until he reports

three separate resurrection appearances that he brings his literary masterpiece to its penetrating pinnacle.

First John reports Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to Mary (20:11-18). Then he reports Jesus' Sunday appearance to the disciples (20:19-25). However, for some unexplained reason, Thomas was absent. When the disciples told him of their encounter, he refused to accept their claim with the words, *“Unless I see in His hand the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe”* (20:25).

A week later, Thomas received his opportunity. The disciples were again assembled, but this time Thomas was with them. Jesus came into their presence and greeted them. He then turned to Thomas and urged him to fulfill his stated desire to touch the crucifixion wounds still present on His resurrected body. Thomas' reaction is the crowning moment in John's inspired narrative. It is the central point to which the entire book is directed. *“Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”* (20:28). This recognition is the singular admission that John's book was designed to elicit. It is no wonder that after bringing the book to this climactic declaration, John articulates his central theme in verses 30-31.

## CONCLUSION

It is God's intention that every single one of us arrive at the very same admission uttered by Thomas. He has given us the evidence. He has provided us with sufficient proof for us to come to the undeniable

and ultimate realization: Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the divine Son of God. The signs that He performed prove it!

Those who will accept the evidence will know that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.” Those who will couple that knowledge with a compliant faith will have “*life in His name.*” Simon Peter put it powerfully:

Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (6:68-69).

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## Chapter 2

# *“My Lord And My God”* **In The Prophets**

*Curtis A. Cates*



Curtis has preached for over thirty years • He is holder of several academic degrees including an Ed.D. from the University of Alabama and post doctoral studies at Abilene Christian University • Curtis has taught at several schools and colleges • Author of several books and tracts • Director of the Memphis School of Preaching, editor of lectureship books • Annette and Curtis have two sons.

**I**n this day and age, the god of the world seems to many people to be man himself; he worships himself. Secular humanism (atheism, evolution, amorality, autonomous man, and one-world government) seems to be the theme of the media, education, politics, and even of the modern-day religionists. But, thanks be to God that man cannot chase God out of His creation, out of His universe. It is an eternal verity that *“there is a God in heaven”* (Dan. 2:28). When man fails to acknowledge, bow before, obey and worship Him, man destroys himself now and eternally. Human life has sacred, innate value only when God is respected and His laws honored and obeyed.

Sincere appreciation is expressed to the East Hill congregation, with its gifted, courageous elders and splendid evangelists, Paul Sain and Brandon Britton, for exalting God in this splendid lectureship with its



critically vital theme. The far-reaching influence of this lectureship will help many return to a saving knowledge of the Lord and of His authority over all mankind: "...*he is Lord of all*" (Acts 10:36). And, great appreciation is expressed to brother Sain as Lectureship Director and also, with sister LaDon, as publisher and editor of the book.

The burden of this chapter in the book is "***My Lord and My God in the Prophets.***"

### **"MY LORD AND MY GOD"**

When the risen Savior met with the apostles upon the day of His resurrection (the first day of the week [John 20:19), the Lord's day]) and "*showed unto them his hands and his side*" (20:20), Thomas "*was not with them when Jesus came*" (20:24). Think of what he missed because he was absent on that important occasion (why he was missing, we know not). When the other apostles told Thomas "*We have seen the Lord,*" he replied, "*Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe*" (20:25). He would not believe the eye-witness testimony of even his fellow apostles who had seen the scars in the Lord's hands and side.

It would be another week ("*after eight days*") before Thomas would get to see the risen Savior (20:26). Knowing of his skepticism, our Lord said to Thomas, "*Reach hither thy finger, and see my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and put it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing*" (20:27). Having obeyed and felt

the scars of the cruel crucifixion of the Messiah, now healed, he exclaimed, *"My Lord and my God"* (20:28)!

From the testimony of Thomas and of the other apostles in Holy Writ, teeming millions would come to believe in Christ, without (as Thomas) having to put their hands into the healed scars upon Christ's physical, resurrected body. The Lord had special commendation for them/us: *"Jesus saith unto him, Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed"* (20:29). Indeed, the gospel of John exists and the miracles are recorded therein *"that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name"* (20:30-31).

The theme of the Bible, from Genesis 3:15 through Revelation 22:21, is the theme of this lectureship volume: *"My Lord and My God."* What folly it would be for you and me, dear reader, and for any other person on this earth to go through life and into eternity without having acknowledged and submitted to the Great Redeemer! The Psalmist (and prophet) David put it thus: *"Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish in the way, For his wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all they that take refuge in him"* (Psm. 2:12).

### **"IN THE PROPHETS"**

One of the greatest areas of testimony of the Messiah and of the evidences of the inspiration of the Scriptures is that of prophecy.

And he said unto them, O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Behooved it not the Christ to suffer these

things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning from Moses and from all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

And he said unto them, These are my words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their minds that they might understand the scriptures; and he said unto them, Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name (by his authority as Lord, Acts 4:7, CAC) unto all the nations beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-47).

The Jews to whom Christ came and who rejected Him (John 1:11) were condemned by their own prophets. *“And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he sent, him ye believe not. Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life”* (John 5:38-40). For man today to reject the Messiah of prophecy is likewise to refuse eternal life, jeopardizing our own souls and judging ourselves *“unworthy of eternal life”* (Acts 13:46).

The Messiah of prophecy was the message of the apostles: *“...this is that which was spoken through the prophet Joel”* (Acts 2:16-21); *“...him, being delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.... For David saith concerning him...”* (2:23-28); *“Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him...he foreseeing this...”* (2:30-36). Those words were spoken by Peter and the eleven on

Pentecost, the birthday of the church of Christ.

Note Peter's words in the temple: *"But the things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled"* (Acts 3:18); *"Moses indeed said, A prophet shall the Lord God raise up..."* (3:22); *"Yea and all the prophets from Samuel and them that followed after, as many as have spoken, they also told of these days. Ye are the sons of the prophets..."* (3:24,25).

Note also the preaching of Stephen: *"This is that Moses, who said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall God raise up..."* (Acts 7:37); *"Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed them that showed before of the coming of the Righteous One; of whom ye have now become betrayors and murderers..."* (7:52). What about the preaching of Philip? *"And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this scripture [Isa. 53], preached unto him [the Ethiopian] Jesus"* (Acts 8:28-35).

Note additionally the preaching of Peter to the Gentiles, the household of Cornelius: *"To him [the Messiah] bear all the prophets witness, that through his name every one that believeth on him shall receive remission of sins"* (Acts 10:43).

Note further the preaching of Paul the apostle: Concerning David he stated,

Of this man's seed hath God according to promise brought unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus....For they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath, fulfilled them by condemning him.... We bring

you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers... (Acts 13:23-32).

That was in Antioch of Pisidia in the synagogue. In Thessalonica,

Paul, as his custom was, went in unto them [in the synagogue], and for three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the scriptures, opening and alleging that it behooved the Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom, said he, I proclaim unto you, is the Christ (Acts 17:2,3).

In fact, Paul’s message was *“nothing but what the prophets and Moses did say should come; how that Christ must suffer, and how that he first by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles”* (26:22,23); for this he was grievously persecuted (26:6-8; et al.). Having arrived in Rome, Paul taught the Jews and *“expounded the matter, testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus, both from the law of Moses, and from the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some disbelieved”* (28:23,24).

## REVERENCE TOWARD GOD IN THE PROPHETS

### *The Prophets*

Joel was the first of the *“writing prophets”* of the Old Testament; thus the times of the writing prophets covered a period of some 400 years, Joel beginning at about 840 B.C. and Malachi’s work, the last, transpiring around 460-450 B.C. The inspired books of the

seventeen "*writing prophets*" are all vitally important, both from the fact that they were forthtellers (preachers to the people of their own day) and from the fact that they were foretellers (predictors of future events, even hundreds of years later), especially of the Messiah.

In examining the prophets, one is impressed with the fact that each bowed before God, was awe-stricken by His majesty, and was meticulous in pleasing Him in character and life, and was absolutely faithful in imparting His sacred truth. Let us view some of the many examples of these attitudes, beginning with Isaiah and continuing as the books appear in the Old Testament, not chronologically.

### **Isaiah**

The prophet Isaiah was privileged to view "*the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple*" (Isa. 6:1). His majesty was covered with a special order of angels, the seraphim (6:2), who cried out in praise, "*Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory*" (6:3). The house shook and was filled with smoke (6:4). What was the prophet's reaction?

Then said I, Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts (6:5).

There is a great blessing in store of such an one who thus humbles himself before the Lord. One of the seraphim touched his lips with a live coal from the altar of God, saying, "*Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and*

*thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin forgiven*" (6:7).

The result was that Isaiah was ready to go for God as a messenger to the children of God. His message was God's message: "*Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for Jehovah hath spoken*" (1:2); "*hear the word of Jehovah...give ear unto the law of our God*" (1:10); "*Therefore saith the Lord, Jehovah of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel*" (1:24); "*Moreover Jehovah said*" (3:16); "*Go and tell this people*" (6:8,9); et al. The prophet held God in the highest of priority and awe in his heart and life, and he proclaimed it: "*This saith Jehovah, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and besides me there is no God*" (44:6); what a contrast to the idols to whom wicked Israel was turning!

## ***Jeremiah***

The awe of the prophet Jeremiah is seen when God told him that He knew Jeremiah before He was formed by God "*in the belly,*" and sanctified Jeremiah before he came from the womb (note the sanctity of human life and his being human before his birth). God then told him, "*I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations*" (Jer. 1:5). Jeremiah's great humility and feeling of inadequacy in the presence of God is seen in his response; "*Then said I, Ah, Lord Jehovah! Behold, I know not how to speak for I am a child*" (1:6). God cannot use prideful, prejudiced persons who feel smug in their own self-sufficiency. Compare Jeremiah's reaction to that of Isaiah (Woe is me!), Moses (Who am I that I should go unto Pharaoh? [Exod. 3:11]); I am not

eloquent [4:10]), and Gideon (Behold, my family is the poorest in Manasseh, and I am least in my father's house [Judg. 6:15]). God's reaction to such humility was, "I can use you!" (Cf Matt. 5:3). God knew that Jeremiah would obey Him and speak His message meticulously.

Note:

But Jehovah said unto me, Say not, I am a child; for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid because of them; for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith Jehovah. Then Jehovah put forth his hand, and touched my mouth; and Jehovah said unto me, Behold I have put my words in thy mouth (1:7-9).

Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto him all that I command thee: be not dismayed at them, lest I dismay thee before them (1:17).

I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them (5:14).

Note also Jeremiah's love for his people: "*Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people*" (9:1). Jeremiah is the "Paul" of the Old Testament prophets, weeping for Israel; also like Paul, he was not married (indeed, forbidden by God to marry, 16:2). He also endured great persecution because of his pure life and faithful, sound message (18:18); he thought of giving up but could not, for there was in Jeremiah's "*heart as it were a burning fire*



*shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain" (20:9-10).*

## **Ezekiel**

Ezekiel, the priest and prophet, was given an awe-inspiring picture of God's glory and His throne. The most nearly like Christ of all of the prophets, Ezekiel saw *"the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah."* When he saw such majesty of God's presence, he says, *"I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake"* (Ezek. 1:28). God said, I can use you, Ezekiel. The Spirit of inspiration entered Ezekiel and commanded him, *"Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to nations that are rebellious"* (2:2-3); *"...thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah; they would know that there hath been a prophet among them"* (2:4-5); *"And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear; for they are most rebellious"* (2:7). Truth does not change based upon the reception or rejection of it, nor does it change with culture or circumstances. Ezekiel's preaching was the closest to the preaching that Jesus did of all the prophets; his preaching more nearly approached the responsibility of the individual for his own sins of any preaching except that which Jesus did. He was given a roll (scroll of God's Word) to eat, and it was sweet as honey, precious. The command then was to *"go, get thee unto the house of Israel, and speak with my words unto them"* (3:1-4); you see, dear reader, Ezekiel was a watchman on the wall, and his job was to teach and warn (3:16-21). His

salvation depended upon his speaking the Word of God as God revealed it to him and to do it without fear or favor.

Ezekiel was privileged to see again God's glory as His sacred presence departed the house of God, the temple, crossed the Brook Kidron on the east side of Jerusalem, arose to the top of the Mount of Olives, and ascended back into heaven (chapters 9-11). Why did God depart from the temple? His presence left the same way Christ left Jerusalem and ascended into heaven (Luke 24:5,51).

Ezekiel learned firsthand and very keenly this vital fact: God's infinite glory can neither sanction, look upon, nor dwell in the presence of sin and rebellion.

...between the porch and altar [of the temple], were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of Jehovah, and their faces toward the east; and they were worshiping the sun toward the east. Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they filled the land with violence, and have turned again to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose [copied after the sweet smell in the temple, a farce]. Therefore will I also not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them (8:16-18).

Can you imagine that? Imagine the impudence and blasphemy of turning one's back to the temple and to the very presence of God, standing between God's

sanctuary and the altar, and doing obeisance to the sun—open, wilful, rebellious defiance to and tantamount to spitting in the face of the God of Israel!!! What a contrast to the reverential awe shown by Ezekiel, who *"fell upon my face, and cried"* (9:8)! God's presence departed from Solomon's temple before His conquering servant, Nebuchadnezzar, captured the city, destroyed the temple, and took the Jews into Babylonian Captivity; He likewise departed from Herod's temple before Judaism and the Law of Moses were nailed to the cross (Rom. 7:1-4; Col. 2:14-17; Matt. 5:17,18). Contrast *"the temple of God"* and *"My house"* (Matt. 21:12,13) to *"Behold, your house is left unto you desolate"* (Matt. 23:38). God's presence had gone back to heaven between these two events and before the cross. Those attempting to delay the cessation of Judaism until A.D. 70 as an acceptable approach to God hold to an untenable, heretical averment. Not one jot or tittle was removed until it was all [totally] done away by the cross (Matt. 5:17,18)!

To the false shepherds [reminiscent of John 10:10-15], irreverent in demeanor and teaching, Ezekiel's message was, *"Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Woe unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the sheep?"* (34:2).

## **Daniel**

Daniel, God's preacher in the palace of the king, Nebuchadnezzar, during the Babylonian captivity, had made a strong resolve early not to defile himself with sins of character or manner of life (Dan. 1:8). He

refused to water down the truth even for kings (Dan. 5), and, even in the face of death, he refused to abandon praying to the God of heaven (Dan. 6). He was ever trusting in Him Whom he described to Nebuchadnezzar thus: “...*there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets*” (2:28). His strong, unswerving, reverent message to Nebuchadnezzar and to Belshazzar was,

...the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the lowest of men.... wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor (4:17,27).

And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this [about Nebuchadnezzar], but thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven (5:21-23).

Daniel recognized that his message was only from God; otherwise, he was no different from anyone else (2:26-30). When we are tempted to magnify and to glory in our own wisdom, we need to remember Daniel; “*But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living*” (2:30). Some claim superior wisdom apart from the Word, direct from the Holy Spirit, just a little less than the apostles. Daniel was inspired; we are not!

Daniel was not hurt by the lions, “*because he had trusted in his God*” (6:23). He taught Nebuchadnezzar to “*tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and steadfast forever, and his kingdom that*

*which shall not be destroyed; and his dominion shall be even unto the end*" (6:26). Daniel revered the "*ancient of days*" (7:9); he acknowledged God's righteousness and confessed his (and the nation's) sins against God (9:7,9). He praised the mercy and forgiveness of God, as well as His justice (9:9-14). He trembled before the Word of God and was speechless (10:11-17).

The other prophets showed the same humility, awe, integrity, loyalty, and reverence toward God, His glory, and His powerful Word, and they fulfilled their mission as prophets, rising early and staying late in the fulfilment of their sacred trust. Their injunction from God was "*to pluck up and to break down and destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant*" (Ezek. 1:10). They accepted the challenges and withstood the abuses (even often with their lives physically threatened) because they viewed Jehovah God as "*My Lord and my God.*" They also foretold of the prophet like unto Moses, the Messiah, who would receive the same appellation. "*Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain to receive the power, and riches, and wisdom, and might, and honor, and glory, and blessing*" (Rev. 5:12).

### **"MY LORD AND MY GOD" PROPHESIED**

The center and circumference of Old Testament predictive prophecy is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the only begotten Son of God, God's suffering servant, and the now reigning King of His eternal kingdom. Those prophecies began with Genesis 3:15, that the seed of woman (necessitating the virgin birth of Christ) would bruise the head of Satan, proceeding with

Deuteronomy 18:15,18-19, that...

Jehovah thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him shall ye harken....I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.

and then proceeding with the writing prophets. How could the prophets, hundreds and even thousands of years before Christ was born, make such predictions with total accuracy and in meticulous details as will be seen concerning the coming King? *"...holy men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit"* (II Peter 1:21). Our Lord Himself spoke of their miraculous phenomenon thus: *"...the scripture cannot be broken"* (John 10:35). In spite of the vicious, unrelenting attacks of skeptics, infidels, and other enemies of the cross, of the souls of mankind, and of man's hope of eternal salvation, the Word of God still stands (Matt. 24:35). *"...the word of the Lord abideth for ever"* (I Peter 1:25). For Jesus Christ to be *"My Lord and my God,"* He had to meet certain criteria and accomplish certain things, of which the prophets predicted hundreds of years before He was ever born.

**In the first place, Christ is "My Lord and my God" because He would be from the right lineage.** The Messiah would descend through Judah and David (Gen. 49:10). Coming from the *"stock of Jesse"* (Isa. 11:1), He is that One of whom God said, *"Behold the days come, saith Jehovah, that I will raise unto David a righteous*

*Branch, and he shall reign as king...*" (Jer. 23:5,6). He would not rule as King on earth (Jer. 22:24-30) but rather in heaven on David's throne (Matt. 1:1-18; Luke 3:23-38). As prophesied, Christ did descend from Judah and David (of course, according to the flesh [on the fleshly side]): "*For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah*" (Heb. 7:14); "*...the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath overcome to open the book...*" (Rev. 5:5).

**In the second place, Christ is "My Lord and my God" because He would be born of a virgin, the seed of woman** (Gen. 3:15). "*...a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel*" (Isa. 7:14), the word almah meaning a woman of marriageable age who has never known a man sexually. The virgin birth would be "*a new thing*" in the land (Jer. 31:22). In no other way could Christ be "*Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*" who would reign on David's throne (Isa. 9:6,7; Cf. Matt. 22:42-46). He had a specially prepared body (Heb. 10:5), in order to be the only begotten Son of God (John 3:16) and also the fleshly descendent of Judah and David.

In meticulous fulfilment of prophecy, "*...that which is conceived in her [Mary] is of the Holy Spirit*" (Matt. 1:20-23). Christ was born of Mary—not begotten by Joseph (Matt. 1:16). In this way, and only in this way was He able to "*be called the Son of God*" (Luke 1:35).

The virgin conception and birth was the *how* and the *when* of the incarnation, God in flesh (Heb.

2:9,10,14,15). Because He was flesh He could be tempted as man but without sin and could be killed and shed His innocent blood as *“the Lamb of God”* for us (John 1:29), and because He was God He could come out of the cemetery (Rom. 1:4) and become the first fruits of the full harvest at the resurrection of the last day (I Cor. 15:20-28). See John 5:28,29; I Thessalonians 4:13-18. No wonder Thomas acknowledged and exclaimed *“My Lord and my God”* after His bodily resurrection!

**In the third place, Christ is *“My Lord and my God”* because He had one who would prepare the hearts of the people for the coming Messiah, Christ the King.** *“The voice of one that crieth, Prepare ye in the wilderness the way [Isa. 35:8] of Jehovah: make level in the desert a highway for our God”* (Isa. 40:3). *“Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, will suddenly come to his temple [the church/kingdom]; and the messenger of the covenant, whom ye desire, behold, he cometh, saith Jehovah of hosts”* (Mal. 3:1).

That forerunner was John the Baptist. *“Even as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face,...John came, who baptized in the wilderness and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins”* (Mark 1:1-4; Cf. Matt. 3:1-11; Luke 3:2-18).

**In the fourth place, Christ is *“My Lord and my God”* because He would prove His identity and Messiahship by miracles.** It was prophesied that His first miraculous work would be in a region characterized by violence, death, and destruction of



war, between the warring nations of Syria and Egypt—the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. *"The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined"* (Isa. 9:1,2).

Seven centuries later, Christ performed the *"beginning of his signs"* in Cana, in the area of Zebulun, as prophesied (cf. Matt. 4:12-16). Christ said, *"...for the works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me"* (John 5:36).

**In the fifth place, Christ is "My Lord and my God" because He would be mercilessly and ruthlessly killed and bare our sins on the cross.** *"I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face from shame and spitting"* (Isa. 50:6).

He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that is before his shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth (Isa. 53:7).

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

The Bible student knows this as prophetic perfect tense, that is, it is certain that it is going to happen and is thus described as having already happened. *"...therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone of sure foundation"* (Isa. 28:16).

His crucifixion was meticulously prophesied: "They pierced my hands and my feet" (Psm. 22:16). Zechariah wrote, "...they shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10). See also Zechariah 13:7. Thanks be to God, Philip (and we) could begin at Isaiah 53:7 and preach to the Ethiopian the fulfilment of these prophesies, Jesus the Christ (Acts 8:30-35)! And, Christ foresaw this when He stated, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself. But this he said, signifying by what manner of death he should die" (John 12:32,33). "And when they came unto the place which was called The Skull, there they crucified him" (Luke 23:33). But, death could not hold the Son of God!

**In the sixth place, Christ is "My Lord and my God" because He would be raised from the dead.** He would be in the grave but three days (Matt. 12:40; cf. Jonah 1:17). Hosea prophesied Christ would arise on the third day (Hosea 6:2).

Christ arose "*the third day according to the scriptures*" (I Cor. 15:3,4). He did "*arise from the dead the third day*" (Luke 24:46). Thus, He was proven to be "*the Son of God*" (Rom. 1:4), Himself God. His resurrection fulfilled Psalm 2 (Acts 13:28ff).

**In the seventh place, Christ is "My Lord and my God" because He would open the fountain of His blood for man's forgiveness.** As the perfect sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:14), He would enable us to conquer sin in our lives (Zech. 13:1). And, having thus "*offered one sacrifice for sin for ever [Christ] sat down on the right hand of God*" (Heb. 10:12). Through Him, then,

we have remission of sins if we become penitent obedient believers (Heb. 10:22; Matt. 26:28; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5; John 19:34; Rom. 6:3-5; II Cor. 5:17).

**In the eighth place, Christ is “My Lord and my God” because He would ascend to reign as King at God’s right hand, over His kingdom.** He would ascend in the clouds to the Ancient of Days to be given dominion and a kingdom (Dan. 7:9-14; Cf. Dan. 2:44; 9:24ff). He did thus ascend and sit upon His throne, where He is now reigning (Acts 1:9-11; Psm. 24:7-10; Acts 2:29-36; Mark 9:1; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4). Persons now make up the kingdom over which Christ rules as King (John 3:3-5; Col. 1:13,14; Rev. 1:6; Heb. 12:28; et al.). See also Zechariah 6:12,13; Hebrews 4:14-5:10.

The kingdom is composed of the obedient believers of all nations, as prophesied (Isa. 56:4; 66:12,21,23; cf. Acts 10:34-35; 15:13-18; 8:26-39). And, it is only in His kingdom where are found all spiritual blessings, according to prophecy (Isa. 56:5,7; 52:3; 55:1; cf. Eph. 1:3; 3:21; II Tim. 2:10; Eph. 1:7; I John 1:3,7; II Cor. 5:17,19; Rom. 6:2-11; et al.).

**In the ninth place, Christ is “My Lord and my God” because He shall return to receive His kingdom.** Daniel wrote,

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall he awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that are wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever (Dan. 12:2-3).

Note Christ’s similar words in John 5:28,29. He is

preparing mansions for the redeemed (John 14:1-4).  
What blessed assurance! What cause to exclaim with  
Thomas, *“My Lord and my God!”*

### **CONCLUSION**

*“Amen: come, Lord Jesus”* (Rev. 22:20)!

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## Chapter 3

# *“My Lord And My God”* **In Redemption**

*Dave Miller*



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**I**n one sense, the central theme of the Bible is *redemption*. It depicts God’s out-working of His plan to reconcile lost humanity to Himself. God’s compassion and beneficent love for human beings pulsates on every page of inspired writ. Hence, every book of the Bible, in one way or another, pertains to the overarching intention of God to provide salvation for all people.

When we come to the book of Romans, we encounter a *magnum opus* on the subject of salvation. Here is a definitive, precise declaration of the principles that are operative in the working out God’s redeeming will. Here is where we gain a deepened appreciation for the incredible redemption that is available to us in Christ.

## CHRIST’S REDEMPTION IN ROMANS

Paul stated the theme of the book in the first chapter (1:16-17). The gospel is God’s power to save people from their sin. The gospel is needed to appease the wrath of God (1:18). This just and divine wrath is directed against the Gentiles (1:21-32). It is also directed against the Jews who are lost due to their own sin (2:1,17) and abject hypocrisy (2:17-21). Though the Jews enjoyed certain unique advantages (3:1-2), they still stood lost and condemned just like the Gentiles (3:9). The Law could not save them (3:20) – since they violated it. So both Jew and Gentile need Christ, grace, and the gospel (3:21-31).

Abraham, the “father of the Jews” (4:1), was not saved in the same fashion that the Jews expected to be saved (4:2). He was saved through an obedient faith just like the Christian system (4:3-25). God’s love (5:5-8) and free gift of grace in Christ (5:2,15-16) is available to alleviate the effects of sin begun by Adam (5:14) and perpetuated by all men. But this grace/faith system does not mean we can sin freely and without compunction (6:1). Doing so would make us a slave to sin (6:6) when our acceptance of Christ and the gospel meant we became dead to sin (6:7-11) and slaves to Christ and obedience (6:11,17).

Since we have been discharged from the law (7:6) to embrace the gospel, what good was the law? It heightened consciousness of sin and the inability of sinful man to save himself through law alone (7:7ff). He needed God to step in and provide Christ (for atonement) and the gospel (7:25). Now that we can

become Christians (8:1), we allow the gospel to control our minds and guide us in life rather than allowing our fleshly passions to control us and commit sin (8:13). Nothing exists that should be allowed to prevent us from loving Christ and God who have provided redemption (8:35-39).

The rejection of Judaism as the way to salvation does not make God unjust or untrue to His promise. As God, He is free to work out His redemptive scheme however He chooses and the Jews can freely choose to obey and fit into that promise (ch. 9). But the Jews by and large chose to reject Christ (10:3) who was the focal point of God's Old Testament plans (10:4). They failed to obey the gospel – though it was presented to them (10:18) and they understood it (10:19). Nevertheless, a remnant of Jews have obeyed the gospel, thus fulfilling God's desires for Israel (11:5). Unbelieving Jews still have the opportunity to accept the gospel (11:14) in the same way that Gentiles have the same opportunity (11:25-26). When it comes to this grand scheme of redemption, God's deep wisdom and ways are unfathomable (11:33-36)!

The rest of Romans (chs. 12-16) depict the logical and intentional outcome of the redemption that is available in Christ. In view of everything that God has done in Christ for both Jew and Gentile, making it possible for us to become Christians, *we must use our bodies for holy living* (12:1). That living out of the gospel in our daily lives means many things. Among others, it means: refraining from a sense of superiority over others (12:3) in order to fulfill our function as



part of the body (12:4-5) in love (12:9-10); refraining from taking the law into our own hands (12:17-21); allowing civil government to take vengeance on criminals (13:1-4) while we as Christians remain submissive to it (13:5-7), loving our neighbor (13:8-10) and not giving in to the flesh (13:14); not insisting on engaging in optional matters if doing so tempts a weaker brother to go against his conscience (ch. 14); bearing with each other (15:1), being unified (15:5), accepting each other (15:7) since all of us (Jew and Gentile) are equal recipients of the gospel (15:8-22). In short, we must remain firmly established in the gospel (16:25).

## KEY COMPONENTS OF REDEMPTION

Listen again to the thematic statement of Romans:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ:  
for it is the power of God unto salvation to every  
one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to  
the Greek (1:16).

This verse actually contains five cardinal concepts that define the parameters of the redemption that Jesus offers. Understanding these principles aids us in grasping the core of the gospel and the magnitude of what God has accomplished in giving Jesus to die on our behalf.

### *Power*

The gospel is powerful in the sense that it is able to accomplish what law alone cannot achieve. Law is powerless to save the one who violates it. Listen

carefully to Paul's explanation:

For what the law could not do, in that *it was weak through the flesh*, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us (8:3-4).

The power of the gospel stands in contrast with the weakness of law as it pertains to the salvation of people.

The law is perfect and authored by God. The weakness actually resides in the person who violates law. God is powerless to save any person (while still remaining a righteous God) except through the gospel of Christ. That's why Christ was "*set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins...that He might be just, and the justifier of him who believes in Jesus*" (3:25-26).

### **God**

The gospel is of divine origin. The gospel is the *divine* antidote to the sin problem.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us (2 Cor. 4:7).

When you present the gospel to people in hopes of converting them, you are wielding a power that is not human, but divine. The resulting salvation is based on the righteousness of God—not man.

For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own

righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God (10:3).

This contrast between the human and the divine is reinforced by Paul to the Philippians:

What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but refuse, that I may win Christ, and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith (Phil. 3:7-9).

In contrast to human righteousness (which is of the law), we see the divine righteousness of the *gospel*. Paul can speak of legal righteousness, or justification by law, as *human* because it is only on the ground of merit that law can justify. If a person could merit his acceptance with God, his justification would not be due to the gracious power of God, but to his own inherent goodness.

### *Salvation*

The ultimate result achieved by the gospel is salvation. The law alone could not achieve salvation for people since human weakness violated it. But what the law could do was condemn the violator and bring death. Law is, therefore, powerful!

I was alive without the law once. But when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. And

the commandment which was for life I found to be unto death (7:9-10).

This same point was made to the Corinthians where law alone is described as *"the letter"* that *"kills"* and *"the ministration of death written and engraven on stones."* Indeed, its own assessment of itself was:

Cursed is every one who continues not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

So the only hope of each person as a human with imperfections is to shift out from under a mere legal system (which can only justify the sinless), and shift over to a dispensation of grace which has been infused with divine power to *"justify the ungodly."* As a result, *"sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace"* (Rom. 6:14).

While we Christians are no longer under the law of God as *"the ministration of condemnation,"* we are forever under the law of God as a principle of obligation and authority.

Paul guarded this point:

Do we, then, make void the law through faith? God forbid; nay, we establish the law (3:31).

So the abrogation of the law through the gospel amounts to its fulfillment. As a code that possesses the power to curse, for Christians it has been done away. But as eternally clothed with power to obligate us to obey it, it has been magnified and honored.

### *Everyone*

The gospel is applied with universality and equality. On the one hand, God would be powerless to save anyone without the gospel; on the other hand, with its rich provisions of grace, God is able to save everyone—*all* who are willing to be saved. The Jew came to think that legalistic righteousness was the key and that made salvation exclusive to the Jews. But he was fooling himself since his own law told him, “*There is none righteous, no not one*” (3:10). That is, with its requirement of absolute moral perfection, no one qualified to achieve righteousness based solely upon the law. Paul shows us the contrast between the universality of the gospel and the exclusiveness of legalism:

But now apart from the law a righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets: even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe; for there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (3:21-23).

Since we are all equally in need, God has made provision equally for all. This is the universalism of the Bible—the gracious offer of salvation to everyone on equal terms. The “*same Lord over all is rich unto all who call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord will be saved*” (10:12-13).

### *Believes*

In addition to universality, the gospel involves conditionality. One must “believe.” The antithesis is

between faith and works (3:27-28). But Reformation theology (i.e., denominationalism) went awry at this point. Paul is not minimizing the essentiality of obedience or works. He contrasts justification meritoriously grounded on works (i.e., total compliance with law) with a justification graciously conditioned on obedient trust—faith that naturally produces works. The Jewish attempt to seek justification on legalistic grounds eliminated Christ, grace and faith. *“If they who are of the law be heirs, faith is made void and the promise of no effect”* (4:14).

The faith that Romans speaks of is *“the obedience of faith”* (1:5; 16:26), i.e., obedience that springs forth from faith or grows out of faith—like Abraham. The *“children of Abraham”* are not those who merely believe, but who also *“walk in the steps of that faith”* which he possessed (4:12). So the antithesis between faith and works that Paul sets up in Romans is that *“faith”* includes more than the mere act of mental belief; it includes outward activity—loving obedience out of a heart full of trust. In opposition to this kind of faith is *“works”* which refers to the meritorious elements of a sinless life which is the only way to achieve legal justification.

## CONCLUSION

When one cares enough to examine carefully the provisions God has made to secure the redemption of we human beings, one cannot help but be struck with awe, gratitude and loving devotion. God has literally done *everything He can do* to make it possible for us to

live with Him eternally. *“O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!”* (11:33). When it comes to the redemption that Jesus has accrued for us, we cannot help but cry out in complete spiritual ecstasy: *“my Lord and my God!”*

## Chapter 4

# *“My Lord And My God” And Unity*

*B. J. Clarke*



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Upon seeing the resurrected Lord, face-to-face, Thomas exclaimed *“My Lord and my God”* (John 20:28). He knew that He was in the presence of Deity, and it caused him to marvel. Adam Clarke wrote:

Thomas perfectly satisfied of the reality of our Lord's resurrection, says unto him, “My LORD! and My GOD!” i.e., Thou art indeed the very same person, my Lord whose disciple I have so long been; and thou art my God, henceforth the object of my religious adoration.

While it is not the focus of this message to examine all of the particulars involved in this episode, our attention is drawn to the implications of Thomas' affirmation. If we were truly to grasp the significance of what he confessed, that Jesus is both Lord and God, how would it revolutionize our lives? How would it help us? How would it change us? The purpose of this lecture is to explore how acknowledging Jesus as



both Lord and God would relate to our quest for religious unity. And so, let us observe that if we were truly to acknowledge Jesus as both Lord and God, we would:

### ACQUIRE A DESIRE FOR UNITY

As we look closely at the prayer of Jesus, in John 17, it is very clear that Jesus greatly desired the unity of His people. He was not so obsessed with His own impending death that He could think of no one or nothing else. Regarding His apostles, He prayed, *“Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are”* (John 17:11, emp. mine throughout, BJC). Furthermore, He focused His gaze upon the welfare of those, in the future, who would believe on Him through the word of His apostles. In particular, He prayed

...that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:21).

As we think of the many selfish last requests made by those facing execution, we see such a contrast in our Lord, Who, in the shadow of His own execution, expressed His selfless request that His people be one.

Hence, if Jesus is really our Lord and God, we will aim to *“walk, even as he walked”* (I John 2:6), if we wish to imitate His example and *“follow in his steps”* (I Pet. 2:21), then we, too, must acquire a fervent desire for unity. The Psalmist exclaimed, *“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in*

*unity*" (Psm. 133:1). Unity among brethren is so important to God that the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to exhort the Corinthians,

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (I Cor. 1:10).

Similarly, when Paul penned the Ephesians, he wrote:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:1-6).

In both of these Pauline passages, we find Paul writing, *"I beseech you,"* a phrase which conveys the sense of a polite command; *"the word signifies a will of the writer that is at the same time warm, personal, and urgent."* Just how urgent the desire for unity should be is captured in the word translated *"endeavouring"* in Ephesians 4:3. The Greek word, employed by Paul in this passage, literally means, *"to give diligence, to be eager, to make every effort."* Unity is so precious that we should expend every effort possible to preserve it. Incidentally, the same Greek word translated *"endeavouring"* in Ephesians 4:3 is also employed in

II Timothy 2:15 where Paul encouraged Timothy to "*give diligence*" (ASV), i.e., make every effort, to show himself "*approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" (II Tim. 2:15).

### **APPREHEND THE DEFINITION OF UNITY**

If acquiring a desire for unity were the only component involved in the process, then unity would be easily achieved. However, it takes more than mere desire to achieve the goal of unity. In the first place, we must ask the question: What constitutes true unity? Who decides what we should be united upon and wherein we can disagree? Just what is the definition of unity? A failure to apprehend the true definition of unity has led many to promote unity with their lips while they practice division with their lives.

Webster's dictionary provides various definitions of unity:

...the quality or state of not being multiple:  
ONENESS...a condition of harmony: ACCORD  
...the quality or state of being made one:  
UNIFICATION...a totality of related parts:  
an entity that is a complex or systematic whole.

From a Biblical perspective there are many things commendable about Webster's definition, even though he was not giving his definition in a religious context. Having said that, we hasten to observe that Webster's definitions are still insufficient to determine the scope of Biblical unity. Because Jesus is our Lord and God, He, (and He alone) has the authority to define the

parameters of unity and fellowship. While it is important to acquire a desire for unity, desire alone will not get the job done. We must be careful to maintain the kind of unity prayed for by our Lord.

A definition of Christian unity is clearly revealed for us in the prayer of Jesus, in John 17. Consider, first of all, the statements made by Jesus concerning His disciples. He prayed to the Father,

*...thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word...For I have given them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me" (John 17:6,8).*

In summary, the disciples are identified as belonging to God on the basis that they had received the words given to Jesus by the Father and had kept those words. The implication is obvious: if the apostles had refused either to receive or keep the words spoken by Jesus, which He had received from the Father, then they would not have belonged to God.

Moreover, Jesus petitioned the Father: *"keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (John 17:11).* Since Jesus would be leaving the earth and returning to the Father, it would be necessary to preserve and protect the faith of the disciples apart from His personal presence. Hence, He asks the Father to keep them *"through thine own name."* Undoubtedly, this request included a number of different things, but it most certainly included the petition that the disciples be kept together by the authority of God's revealed will. Repeatedly,

Jesus emphasized the link between the Word and the relationship the disciples sustained with the Father (John 17:6,8,14,17,19). Because the disciples were following the same Word, they were set apart as members of the family of God. Furthermore, because the same Holy Spirit inspired the apostles, it is inconceivable to picture them as leaders/participants in various religious factions teaching a diversity of religious doctrines.

To truly comprehend Christian unity, it is crucial to understand the true identity of the believers mentioned in verse 20, and to apprehend the meaning of the phrase, *“that they may be one, as we are”* (John 17:11). So important is this phrase that when Jesus prayed for those who would believe on Him in the future (through the word of the apostles), He prayed *“that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us”* (John 17:21). In short, Jesus prayed that His followers, i.e., those who believed on Him through the word of the apostles, would enjoy and participate in the same kind of unity shared by the Father and the Son. Obviously, there are some aspects of the unity of the Father and the Son that we cannot duplicate. For example, both the Father and the Son share the unity of being eternal in nature, a quality that we can never attain. On the other hand, there are aspects of unity between the Father and Son that we can emulate. The late and esteemed brother Guy N. Woods observed that Jesus and the Father are one (in the godhead [sic]), one in communion, aim, and work. This is total, complete

undivided unity; and when applied to the disciples, unity in all matters of doctrine and practice. It would not be possible to state more clearly and unmistakably the Lord's plea for the unity of fellowship for his people; division is taught to be sinful wherever mentioned (I Cor. 1:10ff).

The oneness between the Father and Son does embrace and include unity of teaching. It is utterly inconceivable to think of the Father teaching one thing and Jesus teaching the exact opposite on the same matter. Can you, for one moment, contemplate the Father teaching that one must be baptized to be saved and Jesus, at the same time, teaching that just saying "*the sinner's prayer*" would be sufficient for salvation? If the Father taught that each congregation should be overseen by elders, while the Son taught that a board of deacons would be sufficient to oversee the church, could we really say that unity existed between the Father and the Son? Moreover, if the Father required one pattern for worship and the Son supplied a different pattern, what kind of unity would that be? The very definition of Christian unity is built upon the unity of teaching that exists between the Father and Son.

### **ABHOR THE DISTORTIONS OF UNITY**

Sadly, but surely, not everyone who promotes the need for unity apprehends the true definition of scriptural unity. Some have an unhealthy fixation for unity, to the point that they are willing to compromise the truth in a futile effort to achieve it. Unwilling to

accept the criteria for unity given by God, they fabricate their own kind of unity, which is not unity at all, certainly not the kind of unity for which Jesus prayed in John 17. The following little poem, attributed to Edward Markham, has made the rounds a number of times:

He drew a circle that shut me out;  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.  
But love and I had the wit to win;  
We drew a circle that took him in.

As clever as this little ditty might appear to be, let it be emphasized that we do not have a right to draw our own circles of fellowship. God has already decided who belongs in the circle of fellowship. We can only be in fellowship with those who are in fellowship with God (I John 1:3-7).. In his classic book, **The Bible Only Makes Christians Only and The Only Christians**, brother Thomas B. Warren wisely notes:

Down through the years, it seems, there have always been at least some men who spend the biggest part of their lives in trying to persuade other Christians to accept a “watered down” (unscriptural) view of unity.. Actually, what they are pleading for is not unity but is mere union (that which is gained by compromise of the truth with error)—it is what they call unity but which is gained at the expense of truth and is not based on truth. Some men seem to become so carried away by the thought of unity that they lose the proper perspective: they come to hold that unity is logically and Biblically prior to truth (that is, that unity must be gained at any price—even at the expense of truth). They plead for “unity-in-diversity”—by which, they mean, that we must

have unity even with those who reject matters which the New Testament makes clear are matters of obligation. This Christ will not tolerate.

One of the buzzwords of the day is the word "*ecumenical*," which Webster defines as "*promoting or fostering Christian unity throughout the world...including or containing a mixture of diverse elements or styles.*" While no one should oppose promoting or fostering Christian unity, the ecumenical movement does not promote Christian unity. Rather, it promotes an interdenominational "*agree to disagree*" sort of "*unity.*" Again, brother Warren's comments are right on target:

The fact that men have an obligation to strive for unity in Christ does not warrant the conclusion that men can have the approval of God while "*agreeing to disagree*" on matters not of mere option but of obligation (either obligation to do something or obligation not to do something). It is true, of course, that two men can both be pleasing to God while disagreeing on matters which—according to Bible teaching—are matters of mere option (expediency—matters in which human judgment can be exercised with God's approval). But, such is not the case in matters of obligation. For two men to be right on matters of obligation, they must hold to the same view and practice the same thing in regard to that particular matter (I Cor. 1:10-13).

Although the ecumenical movement claims to promote undenominational Christianity, in fact it proliferates denominational sectarianism. Consider some manmade distortions of unity.



## **Merrill C. Tenney’s Distorted “Unity”**

Denominational theologian Merrill C. Tenney writes:

Within the church of historic Christianity there have been wide divergences of opinion and ritual. Unity, however, prevails wherever there is a deep and genuine experience of Christ; for the fellowship of the new birth transcends all historical and denominational boundaries. Paul of Tarsus, Luther of Germany, Wesley of England, and Moody of America would find deep unity with each other, though they were widely separated by time, by space, by nationality, by educational background, and by ecclesiastical connections. Such unity was what Jesus petitioned in His prayer, for He defined it as the unity which obtained between Himself and the Father...This relationship lay in a common nature rather than in an identity of minds or of persons. Jesus did not pray for absolute unanimity of mind, nor for uniformity of practice, nor for union of visible organization, but for the underlying unity of spiritual nature and of devotion which would enable His people to bear a convincing testimony before the world.

This quotation is fraught with numerous erroneous assertions and gross misinterpretations of the kind of unity for which the Savior prayed. In the first place, it is important to note that Jesus was not praying that people in all of the denominations would come together and be one. Rather, Jesus prayed for the unity of “them also which shall believe on me through their (the apostles’) word” (John 17:20).

What about Tenney’s suggestion that “the

fellowship of the new birth transcends all historical and denominational boundaries"? Let us not forget that the new birth is only experienced by those who have been born of the water and the Spirit (John 3:5), i.e., being baptized in water after hearing the Word of God, which came from the Spirit of God (Acts 8:26-40; Eph. 6:17). Yet, those who become members of denominations teach that the new birth can be experienced without being baptized in water.. Such a suggestion is erroneous; therefore, since members of denominations have not truly experienced the new birth, they are not yet in the family of God. How, then, can we fellowship and share spiritual unity with someone who is not even in God's family?

Furthermore, no one who has believed on Christ through the word of the apostles ever became a member of a denomination by so doing. When nearly three thousand souls gladly received the word of the apostles on the day of Pentecost, by being baptized, they were added to the Lord's church, not a manmade denomination (Acts 2:41,47). Those who were saved, during the time of the New Testament, did not divide into a multiplicity of religious sects and begin worshipping God in their own different ways from within those different sectarian groups. On the contrary, those who were saved became members of the body of Christ, the church of Christ (I Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; 5:23). Thus, it is absurd to affirm, as Tenney has done, that "Paul of Tarsus, Luther of Germany, Wesley of England, and Moody of America would find deep unity with each other." The apostle

Paul is the only one on Tenney’s list that has even obeyed the gospel plan of salvation. How could the apostle Paul possibly find unity with those who have never even become members of the family of God? Moreover, Luther taught salvation by faith only; Paul taught that man is saved by grace through a faith “that worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). Wesley and Moody never taught that one is baptized into Christ as did Paul in Romans 6:3-4 and Galatians 3:27. Furthermore, they never gave the same answer to lost souls seeking salvation as did Peter in Acts 2:38. How could the apostle Paul have “deep unity” with men that did not even teach the truth on how to become a Christian?

### **William Barclay’s Distorted “Unity”**

William Barclay, a well-known commentator, advances his view of unity in the following words:

What was that unity for which Jesus prayed? It was not a unity of administration or organization; it was not in any sense an ecclesiastical unity. It was a unity of personal relationship. We have already seen that the union between Jesus and God was one of love and obedience. It was a unity of love for which Jesus prayed, a unity in which men loved each other because they loved him, a unity based entirely on the relationship between heart and heart. Christians will never organize their Churches all in the same way. They will never worship God all in the same way. They will never even all believe precisely the same things. But Christian unity transcends all these differences and joins men together in love. The cause of Christian unity at the present time, and indeed all through

history, has been injured and hindered, because men loved their own ecclesiastical organizations, their own creeds, their own ritual, more than they loved each other. If we really loved each other and really loved Christ, no Church would exclude any man who was Christ's disciple. Only love implanted in men's hearts by God can tear down the barriers which they have erected between each other and between their churches.

It would be difficult to find a quotation more in opposition to the nature of unity for which Jesus prayed. He argues that the unity of John 17 is "a unity based entirely on the relationship between heart and heart." Therefore, according to Barclay, we cannot expect, nor should we demand, complete unanimity of agreement on what the Bible teaches provided we have a loving relationship toward our religious neighbors. Remarkably, he makes the statement that "Christians will never organize their Churches all in the same way." Wait a minute! How could a man write a commentary on the entire New Testament and fail to observe that in the first century, under the guidance of inspired apostles, the Lord's church was organized in the same way (Acts 14:23; I Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; I Peter 5:1-4)?

The same is true regarding the worship of the early church. Mr. Barclay avers that Christians will never worship God in the same way. Yet, in the New Testament record of the early church, they did the very thing that Barclay says Christians will never do: they worshipped God according to the same pattern (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; I Cor. 11:23ff;

16:1-2). If the Bible teaches anything at all, it teaches that God is concerned about our manner of worship. They that worship God must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). If God is not concerned about our style of worship, then perhaps Mr. Barclay will explain to us why Cain's offering of worship was rejected whereas Abel's was accepted (Gen. 4:1-10; Heb. 11:4). If our style of worship is not a matter of significance to God, then why did Nadab and Abihu go up in smoke for offering strange and unauthorized fire (Lev. 10:1-2)?

Suppose one of the Jews in the Old Testament had decided to bring a cow to the priest to offer as a sacrifice instead of the unblemished lamb required by God. Would his style of worship have mattered to God? Could a Jew have faithfully observed the Passover by using leavened bread rather than the specified unleavened bread? Furthermore, what if someone's style of worship today moves them to substitute pizza and Coca-Cola on the Lord's table instead of unleavened bread and fruit of the vine? Doesn't Paul's stern rebuke to the Corinthians concerning their manner of observing the Lord's supper prove that our style of worship matters to God (I Cor. 11:17-34)?

Jesus condemned those who vainly worshipped Him by following the doctrines and commandments of men (Matt. 15:9). Paul indicted the Athenians with worshipping ignorantly (Acts 17:23). He charged the Colossians with "will-worship" (Col. 2:23). Peter admonished Cornelius for worshipping him (Acts

10:25-26). Angelic beings forbid John from worshipping them and instructed him to worship God and God alone (Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9; 4:10; 5:14; 7:11-12; 9:20; 11:16; Matt. 4:10). How could anyone read these passages and conclude that style of worship is an insignificant matter in determining religious fellowship?

As for Barclay's affirmation that "if we really loved each other and really loved Christ, no church would exclude any man who was Christ's disciple," we can only reply that if Mr. Barclay truly understood the Bible doctrine of how to become Christ's disciple, and what it really means to love Christ, he would never make such an outlandish statement. But, what does it mean to love Jesus? According to Jesus, to love Him truly is to keep His commandments. He said,

If ye love me, keep my commandments...He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself to him...If a man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not and keepeth not my sayings (John 14:15, 21, 23-24).

To this the apostle John added,

And hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know that we are in him (I John 2:3-5).

The implication of these verses is both startling and obvious. Our claim to love Jesus is verified by obedience to His commands. On the other hand, our claim to love Him is nullified by our disobedience. Mr. Barclay believes that loving Jesus is the only criterion for religious unity. Is he willing to follow this criterion to its logical end? If so, then he must refuse to fellowship all that refuse to obey the commandments of Jesus, for to truly love Jesus is to obey His will. Therefore, if Jesus commands people to be immersed for the remission of sins and certain people refuse to obey this command, then they do not really love Jesus. Hence, to be consistent with his own stated criterion, Mr. Barclay must refuse to fellowship such people.

### **Rubel Shelly’s Distorted “Unity”**

In 1985, Freed-Hardeman University hosted the Preachers and Church Leaders Forum, on the subject of The Restoration Movement and Unity. Alan Highers and William Woodson did an excellent job of affirming the restoration plea to speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent (I Peter 4:11). On the other side of the issue were Monroe Hawley and Rubel Shelly. At the conclusion of one of his speeches, Rubel Shelly made the following emotional appeal:

I will stand at the foot of the cross of the Son of God. I will accept cleansing by his blood from all my guilt and stain. And I will call any and all who hear my voice to stand on the same spot to receive the same cleansing. I will not stand

there with my fists clenched trying to keep them away. I will stand there pointing up to the Son and asking them to come. As we stand there, I will claim all the rest of that born-again body as my brethren. I will fellowship them as my brothers in Christ and lovingly, patiently, gently teach and learn within that group as we live on the second level of fellowship. Judgment of all of us standing here rests solely with the One whose blood has cleansed us all, and I will not usurp his authority to assign a single one to damnation. If in order to be "sound," I must tell you this person is going to hell, I will never be sound in your eyes. I gave up judgment and left that to God. I will state the conditions of salvation and pardon as given in the word, and the judge will handle it when he comes to him. I will plead for his grace to be extended to all of us who stand at the foot of the cross, cleansed by the blood, because no one is going to require more of that grace than I will. I will need it from you as well as from him. So let's stop the ugly fighting. Let's move away from an atmosphere of suspicion and slander. Let's move closer to the cross!

In response to the foregoing, we do not doubt that the cross of Jesus Christ plays a vital role in the formation of unity. Indeed, the blood of Jesus was shed on Calvary in order to make it possible for both Jew and Gentile to be one. He died "for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:15-16). However, it is apparent that our erring brother Shelly did not then (and does not now) comprehend



all that is involved in the unity that the cross produces.

Notwithstanding the emotive language of our erring brother Shelly, there is more, much more, to the formation of unity than just giving emotional speeches about the unifying power of the cross. On the cross, Jesus tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9). However, that does not mean that every man will be saved. Although the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared unto all men (Titus 2:11), Jesus is the author of salvation only “unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). Thus, if someone refuses to obey the gospel and follow the pattern of teaching given by our Lord, his or her disobedience is an insurmountable barrier to unity/fellowship. It is not enough to preach the importance of the cross—we must also preach the importance of how one accesses the blessings of the cross, one of which is the privilege of being added to the one body and living in unity and harmony with the other members of the body.

It is unfair to characterize those who love the truth, and insist on obedience to the truth, as being like someone standing at the foot of the cross with clenched fists, trying to keep people away. That kind of picture might be a good emotional device to use in a speech, but it is completely inaccurate. The Lord is not standing at the cross with clenched fists, trying to keep people away. On the other hand, He will not accept those who refuse to obey Him! It is impossible to honor Christ without honoring His Word! Consider what Jesus said:

Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and  
of my words in this adulterous and sinful

generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:38).

It is indeed ironic that some of the very ones who claim that all they want to do is exalt Christ as Lord and Savior, are the same ones who reject His plain teaching on how to be saved, how to be added to the church, etc. If these men would truly regard Jesus as both Lord and God, they would respect His Word and cease supplanting it with their own.

### **Jesus Christ's Dissertation On Unity**

One of the biggest keys to avoiding the distortions of unity some are advancing today is to understand how, and when, unity is formed. Since Jesus is both Lord and God, then His teaching should settle the matter as to how and when unity is realized by His followers. Carefully read the following statements from Jesus:

While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother (Matthew 12:46-50).

And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it (Luke 8:21).

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Matt. 7:21-23).

These three passages are decisive in the matter of how unity is formed. The divine text in Matthew 12:46-50 contains the intriguing question of our Lord, “Who is my mother and who are my brethren?” The record says that his mother and brothers stood outside wanting to talk to him. Word spread quickly through the crowd until one finally interrupted Jesus to tell him that his mother and brothers desired to speak with him. Upon hearing this, Jesus asked the question, “Who is my mother and who are my brethren?” In asking this question, Jesus was emphasizing that spiritual ties are far more important, binding, and sacred than even fleshly ties. It is far better to be spiritually related to Jesus than even physically related. Jesus was simply pointing out that He felt a closer tie to His spiritual followers than He did to His own physical brethren who at this point of His ministry did not even believe in Him (John 7:3-5). Thus, the critical question in life is, “Am I spiritually related to Jesus?” Could Jesus stretch out his hand toward me and acknowledge me as a member of His spiritual family?

This, of course, raises another question: By what

process does one become a member of the family of God? To ask the question from a physical standpoint helps us to see clearly the main point. How did you become a member of your physical family? The answer, of course, is by the process of birth. Likewise, a birth process is involved in becoming spiritually related to Jesus. Except a man be born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Yea, verily, except a man be born of water and the spirit he cannot see the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5). Physical birth, in and of itself, does not make us spiritually related to Jesus. Jesus said that His mother and brethren are those who hear and do His will (Matt. 12:50; Luke 8:21). This is a critical point to understand, so crucial that it needs to be emphasized over and over again. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Moreover, we are to be doers of the Word and not hearers only (James 1:22).

The question naturally arises, what must we hear? First, we must hear that we are sinners (Rom. 3:10,23). Second, we must hear that a Savior has come to atone for our sins through his death, burial, and resurrection (I Cor. 15:1-4). Third, we must know that salvation is a gift of grace (Titus 2:11; Eph. 2:8-9). Fourth, we must recognize that our acceptance of salvation by grace must involve trusting obedience (Heb. 5:8-9).

As important as it is to hear the Word of God, just hearing the Word will not add me to the family of God. According to Jesus, it is he that "doeth the will of the Father which is in heaven" who shall go to

heaven (Matt. 7:21). What must we do? First, we must acknowledge our sinfulness and hopeless condition apart from Christ (Eph. 2:11-13). Second, we must believe that Jesus is who He claimed to be: the very I AM, The Son of God (John 8:24). Third, we must repent of our sins, in accordance with Luke 13:3. Fourth, confession with the mouth is essential to follow up our faith and repentance (Rom. 10:9,10). Fifth, we must be baptized in water for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 22:16; I Peter 3:21). Sixth, we must walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). This, in brief detail, is the methodology or process by which we become spiritually related to Jesus.

Therefore, from Matthew 12:46-50; 7:21-23 and Luke 8:21, we learn that we cannot enjoy unity nor have spiritual fellowship with someone who does not do the will of the Father which is in heaven. Furthermore, Jesus is not pleased with everyone who attempts to do a wonderful work in His name. He will not automatically welcome them to heaven on the basis of their wonderful works. The only ones who are going to heaven are those who do the will of the Father which is in heaven!

### **AVOID THE DISRUPTION OF UNITY**

Some division occurs even in the Lord's church. This occurs because men exalt their self-will above the peace and harmony of the church. Some would rather have their way even if it means disrupting the body of Christ over matters of opinion. It is remarkable to observe how some people always seem to be in the

vicinity of strife and bitterness. If a quarrel is ongoing, you can be sure that they are not far from the scene; either they are embroiled in the quarrel themselves, or they are instrumental in causing a quarrel between others. The Psalmist must have had such people in mind when he wrote, "My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war" (Psm. 120:6-7).

The party spirit that developed in the church at Corinth can be traced to the carnal, selfish desires of certain members to exalt themselves and their group above everyone else (I Cor. 1:10). The inspired apostle Paul did not tell the brothers at Corinth to appreciate the diverse doctrinal views of others and not to worry about believing the same things..

Jesus exhorted His disciples, "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another" (Mark 9:50). The surrounding context of this command is enlightening. Earlier, the disciples had quarreled among themselves as to who should be the greatest (Mark 9:33-34). They had also manifested a spirit of jealousy regarding the man (who was not a member of the apostolic band) who cast out demons (Mark 9:38-39). Hence, Jesus admonished them to have peace one with another.

The epistles of Paul also exhort God's people to have a passion for peace. He wrote to the Romans, "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another" (Rom. 14:19). He encouraged the Corinthians to "live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (II Cor. 13:11). Peacemaking is a vital

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matter and great haste should be given to produce it. No doubt, this is why Paul commanded the Thessalonians, “be at peace among yourselves” (I Thess. 5:13).

Remembering that “we be brethren” (Gen. 13:8) can often assist us in working amicably together. Moses said, “Sirs, ye are brethren: why do ye wrong to one another” (Acts 7:26).

Adam Clarke aptly comments:

It has been often seen that in those times when the ungodly oppressed the Church of Christ, its own members have been separated from each other by disputes concerning comparatively unessential points of doctrine and discipline, in consequence of which both they and the truth have become an easy prey to those whose desire was to waste the heritage of the Lord.

Whereas we disagree with Adam Clarke on many important doctrinal points, and though we would disagree regarding exactly what constitutes “comparatively unessential points of doctrine,” the fact of the matter is that Mr. Clarke has all too accurately described a mindset which has done great harm to the body of Christ. Lest we be misunderstood, we affirm that some points of doctrine are absolutely non-negotiable! Having said that, we also confidently affirm that the local church, and the brotherhood in general, has often split over matters that don’t matter. The comments of Bill Jackson on this matter cannot be improved upon:

The haste to divide has furthered disunity rather than causing men to study and labor to work

together. If the Corinthian congregation, guided by inspired instruction from Paul, did not divide and sub-divide, but rather made correction of their problems, then surely our brethren can labor to bring out the unity for which Jesus prayed. But, it will take, again, an allegiance to the Word of the Lord, a removal of self-will, and a granting of authorized liberties before that unity can be realized. In so many places, an eagerness to divide and a non-spiritual attitude has produced two or more congregations in localities where only one faithful and working group is needed. The Cause is weakened, and the eyes of the world see division clearly established in their midst, and permanent harm is done. The division is there, the buildings are paid for, and both weak groups go on throughout life, never taking any action to correct the harm done to the Cause, or to make it right the terrible things said and one in creating the break in fellowship. With what the Lord said about those causing discord among brethren (Prov. 6:19), some brethren will not fare well when they meet these things in judgment. It pays, always, to do what the Lord says, and he demands that we work for unity among brethren.

You can mark it down—when members of the church bite and devour one another (Gal. 5:15), and divide over matters that do not matter, an unconverted world stands by watching, and they will remain unconverted. Moreover, Satan watches and laughs because he is winning two ways at the same time. To be sure, we must demand unity in matters of faith, but in matters of opinion, we must allow liberty, and in all things we must demonstrate charity!



## CONCLUSION

A collage of passages serve as a fitting conclusion to this chapter.

I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts (Psm. 119:63).

They that fear thee will be glad when they see me; because I have hoped in thy word...Let those that fear thee turn unto me, and those that have known thy testimonies (Psm. 119:74,79).

Depart from me, ye evildoers : for I will keep the commandments of my God...Therefore I esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way...Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law...I beheld the transgressors and was grieved; because they kept not thy word (Psm. 119:115, 128, 136, 158).

Although all of these passages are from the Old Testament, we are reminded that “whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning” (Rom. 15:4). Certainly, some valuable principles about fellowship and unity can be gleaned from these texts.

The Psalmist was willing to fellowship only those who revered and obeyed the Word of God. Those who possess a deep love for the truth rejoice when they see others who are walking in truth (II John 1-4). Those who share the same love and devotion for God’s Word gravitate to one another; those who do not love the truth are anxious to avoid being in the presence of those who do. Those who love the truth are grieved at the irreverence and disobedience toward the Word of God that is manifested by so many today. In

essence, these passages show that unity is formed between brethren who have the same respect for the Word of God and the same earnest desire to obey its precepts!

What can we do that will make it easier to realize the kind of unity for which Jesus prayed? We have already mentioned Paul's exhortation to the Ephesians to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). What we did not emphasize is the verse preceding this exhortation. In Ephesians 4:2, Paul commanded the brethren at Ephesus to conduct themselves "with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." Likewise, the very first beatitude, "blessed are the poor in spirit," is the root of carrying out all the other beatitudes.

It is impossible to properly develop a peaceable disposition without first cultivating humility, meekness, and long suffering. When we humble ourselves, and see ourselves as we really are, awareness of our own shortcomings prods us to judge others with a gentler judgment, because we know how much we need the same. It is by pride that contentions come (Prov. 13:10). Moreover, the selfish desire to always have our way, rather than to give way on inconsequential matters, is a prescription for strife and disaster.

Once we possess the right attitude, we must unite upon the right standard for unity to occur. That standard must be the Word of God. In Ephesians 4, Paul listed seven "ones" that, if properly defined and

followed, will result in unity. Carefully consider the following list:

- One body - unity of organization  
(I Cor. 12:20; Eph. 2:14-16; I Tim. 3:15).
- One Spirit - unity of guidance  
(Gal. 5:16-18, 22-26; Rom. 8:1-17).
- One hope - unity of aspiration  
(Titus 1:1-2; Heb. 6:19; Rom. 2:7).
- One Lord - unity of authority  
(Matt. 17:5; 28:18; Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 1:1-2;  
Col. 1:18).
- One faith - unity of message (Jude 3; Rom. 10:17;  
Rom. 4:21).
- One baptism - unity of practice (I Cor. 12:13;  
Rom. 6:1-5; Acts 2:38; 22:16).
- One God - unity of worship (Matt. 4:10; John 4:24).<sup>13</sup>

In his book **I Just Want To Be A Christian**, Rubel Shelly pointed to Ephesians 4 and the seven ones as a blueprint for unity. Yet, he failed to properly define the seven ones, and he failed to connect the teaching of Ephesians 4 with the rest of the New Testament. For example, he limited the definition of the “one faith” to that which pertains to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His narrow definition is repudiated by the apostle Paul’s use of the term elsewhere (Gal. 1:23; I Tim. 5:8). The one faith encompasses all that Jesus and His apostles taught by inspiration (Mark 8:38; Jude 3).

The words of Thomas B. Warren provide a fitting conclusion to this lesson. He wrote:

The truth of the matter is: the unity which is authorized by the New testament should be both recognized and honored by all accountable persons. This involves (1) ATTAINING Christian unity by being baptized in the name of Christ (and, thus, being added by the Lord Himself to the church which He purchased with His own blood, Acts 20:28) and (2) MAINTAINING that unity by living faithfully as a member of that church (I John 1:7; cf. Eph. 1:22-23; Heb. 3:12-13).<sup>14</sup>

May God help us to ever keep in mind: (1) that in matters of obligation there must be unity, (2) that in matters of expediency (option) there must be liberty (to exercise human judgment, to choose one of two or more optional matters), and (3) that in all things there must be love—love for God, love for brethren in Christ, and love for all men (Matt. 22:34-40; Gal. 6:10; I John 4:20; Rom. 12:20-21). We must strive for scriptural unity with all of our hearts, but we must not demand unity at the expense of truth.<sup>15</sup>

Let us work diligently to acquire a desire for unity, while at the same time apprehending the true definition of unity, and abhorring any distortion of God's plan for unity. Also let us avoid the unnecessary disruption of unity in the body of Christ. May we never be guilty of disrupting the unity of the body because of our own selfish will. At the same time, may we never be ashamed of lovingly standing for the truth, even if it causes some to leave the body of Christ. As much as we desire unity, let us not be deceived into accepting a fabricated unity made with human hands. Let us augment the development of

unity by possessing the attitudes of humility and meekness and reverence for the Word of God! Most of all, may we anticipate the delights of unity which will be ours to enjoy when as one body we sit around the glory-circled throne of God and sing His everlasting praises!

### ENDNOTES

1 From Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1996 by BibleSoft)

2 Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, **Linguistic Key To The Greek New Testament** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), p. 530.

3 Ibid.

4 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary On The Gospel According to John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1981), p. 358.

5 Thomas B. Warren, **The Bible Only Makes Christians Only And The Only Christians** (Jonesboro, Ark.: National Christian Press, 1986), pp. 198-199.

6 Ibid, p. 178.

7 Merrill C. Tenney, **John: The Gospel of Belief** (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 1946), p. 249.

8 William Barclay, **The Gospel of John: Volume 2 (Chapters 8 to 21)** (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), p. 218.

9 Rubel Shelly, **The Restoration Movement and Unity: Preachers and Church Leaders Forum** (Henderson, TN: Freed Hardeman College, 1986), p. 55.

10 This passage has often been twisted to teach that Jesus encouraged His disciples to fellowship religious people who believed and practiced different things than Jesus and His disciples. However, the key phrase in the context is "in my name" (Mark 9:39). The record says that the man casting out these demons was doing so in the name of, i.e. by the authority of Jesus (Cf. Acts 4:7). It just so happened that he was not one of the twelve. But this did not rule out the fact that he was an

authorized follower of Jesus and that he was doing miracles in the name (by the authority) of Jesus. Hence, one did not have to be numbered among the apostles to be counted as a faithful follower of Jesus.

11 **Clarke's Commentary**, Vol. 1., p. 300.

12 Bill Jackson, "The Unity Of All Believers," **The Firm Foundation Of God Standeth**, eds. William S. Cline & John G. Priola (Pensacola: The Firm Foundation Publishing House, 1984), pp.98-99.

13 Clifford Newell, Jr., "Unity: A Greek Word Study," **The Bible Doctrine Of Unity** ed. Neal Pollard, (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1997), p. 45.

14 Warren, p. 173

15 *Ibid*, p. 179.

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## Chapter 5

# *“My Lord And My God”* **In Worship**

*James Meadows*

James Meadows is an excellent speaker, writer, and widely known throughout the brotherhood for his excellent classroom and private study books (almost forty) ~ He has written many articles for several different religious papers ~ James is presently working with the East Tennessee School of Preaching in Knoxville, TN.



**T**he Pulaski Lectures have long been recognized for their content and their soundness. The East Hill Church of Christ is to be commended for choosing a timely and needed theme, *“My Lord and My God.”*

It is my responsibility in this lecture to discuss *“My Lord and My God in Worship.”* The methodology of study is as follows: (1) The context of the statement, *“my Lord and my God”*; (2) What is the meaning of worship; (3) Why we should worship God; (4) What are the kinds of worship God will not accept; (5) Some changes men are trying to make in worship; (6) Conclusion.

### **The Context Of The Statement** ***“My Lord And My God”***

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them; then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst,



and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed (John 20:26-29).<sup>1</sup>

Jesus had earlier appeared to the disciples on the first day of the week (John 20:19). “*But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came*” (John 20:24). Thomas did not believe them when they told him they had seen the Lord (John 20:25).

Eight days later the Lord appeared to the disciples again and Thomas was present. The Lord came in the same manner this time as he did before and gave the same salutation. Jesus now cheerfully gave Thomas the infallible test which he proposed:

It is an affecting word with which Christ closes up what he had to say to Thomas: **Be not faithless, but believing.** This warning is given to us all: **Be not faithless** for, if we are faithless, we are Christless, graceless, hopeless and joyless.<sup>2</sup>

Now that sufficient evidence has been presented, Thomas surrendered his heart and mind to the demands of the facts. The Lord said, “*because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed....*” “*Thomas then made the highest confession of faith that has yet been made—“My Lord and my God.”*” Jesus accepted Thomas’ assessment of his identity because he was/is Lord; he was/is God. John, in the beginning of his Gospel account, assigns to Jesus the title of God (John 1:1), and here at the

end Thomas confesses Jesus as God. In one dramatic statement Thomas sums up the message of the entire gospel according to John.

### What Is The Meaning Of Worship

Man seems to be incurably religious and filled with a desire to worship. Arthur Devan said, speaking of man's desire to worship: *"Worship remains, because the impulse to worship is elemental and universal."* Voltaire, the agnostic said, *"If there were no God, it would be necessary to invent him"* (implying a strong desire in man to worship). *"What greater calamity can fall upon a nation than the loss of worship"* (Thomas Carlyle).

The word worship in its various forms appears 190 times in the Bible. There are four Hebrew words translated *"worship"* in the Old Testament. They are: (1) **seged**-*"To bow down, do obeisance"*; (2) **astab**-*"To make an idol or image, to portray"*; (3) **abad**-*"To serve"*; (4) **shachah**-*"To bow self down."*

There are ten Greek words translated worship in the New Testament. They are: (1) **doxa**-*"Glory, esteem"*; (2) **eusebo**-*"To be reverent, or pious"*; (3) **latreuo**-*"To serve, worship publicly"*; (4) **neokoros**-*"A temple sweeper or keeper, worshipper of deity"*; (5) **proskuneo**-*"to kiss (the hand) toward"*; (6) **sebazomai**-*"to venerate, reckon venerable"*; (7) **sebomai**-*"to venerate"*; (8) **sebasma**-*"an object of veneration"*; (9) **therapeuo**- *"to serve, care, heal"*; and (10) **threskeia**-*"fear of the gods, religious observance."*

Worship includes the idea of esteem, reverence, obeisance and service. Our English word *"worship"*

comes from the old Anglo-Saxon **weorthscipe**. **Weorth** means worthy, deserving of honor, praise, or the like. **Scipe** means state or quality of being.

The predominant idea in worship is that of obeisance, homage or reverence. It is expressed mainly by the Old Testament word for “*bowing down*.” It is expressed mainly by the New Testament word for “*kissing the hand*” toward. This is an “*act in oriental countries signifying obeisance. In the New Testament it denotes homage, reverence, awe, etc., and it includes such acts as may be utilized in expressing or exhibiting these emotions and attitudes.*”<sup>3</sup>

Worship is more than a matter of the heart.

In the American Standard Version of the New Testament at Matthew 2:2, there is a reference to a footnote which reads: **The Greek word denotes an act of reverence whether paid to a creature** (see ch. 4:9; 18:26) **or to the Creator** (see ch. 4:10). The Greek word denotes an **act**. Acts are an essential part of worship. The view that worship is simply and solely an attitude—to be distinguished from, and dissociated with, Acts—is not in harmony with the facts in the case. The Greek word denotes an act **paid**. Worship is an attitude; but it is more; it is an attitude that expresses itself in an act—an act paid to another. To worship then, one must engage in acts.<sup>4</sup>

### **Why We Should Worship God**

First, God is the **proper object** of our worship. Idols and the works of men’s hands are not to be worshipped (Exod. 20:4-5; 32; Jer. 1:16). The devil is an improper object of worship.

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve (Matt. 4:8-10).

Angels are not to be worshipped. John was rebuked when he tried to worship an angel.

And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God (Rev. 22:8-9).

Good men are not the proper object. Cornelius fell down before Peter to worship him, but Peter said: "...stand up; I myself also am a man" (Acts 10:25-26). Paul and Barnabas refused the worship of the people at Lystra (Acts 14:15). Jesus said, "*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*" (Matt. 4:10).

Second, God **deserves** our worship.

The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created (Rev. 4:10-11).

First, He deserves our worship because He is our creator.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen.1:26-27).

*“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God...”* (Psm. 95:6-7a).

Second, He deserves our worship because He is great and God alone.

All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things; thou art God alone (Psm. 86:9-10).

Third, He is holy.

Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool: for he is holy...Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his holy hill; for the Lord our God is holy (Psm. 99:5, 9).

Fourth, He is our Father in two senses. He is the Father of all mankind by creation and procreation. He is the spiritual Father of the redeemed (II Cor. 6:18). Fifth, He has purchased us with a price.

What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in

your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (I Cor. 6:19-20).

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers: But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (I Peter 1:18-19).

Third, God **desires** our worship. The continuity of the Bible from Abel on shows this. The men approved of God were worshippers of God. Abraham built his altar at Bethel and "*called upon the name of the Lord*" (Gen. 12:8). Noah, upon coming out of the ark, "*builded an altar unto the Lord*" (Gen. 8:20). Isaac, at Beersheba, built an altar "*and called upon the name of the Lord*" (Gen. 26:25). Jesus told the woman of Samaria "*...for the Father seeketh such to worship him*" (John 4:23).

Fourth, God **demand**s our worship. When God gave the ten commandments on Sinai he spoke these words to the children of Israel:

And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me: And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments (Exod. 20:1-6).

Jesus said, “*Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve*” (Matt. 4:10). The angel told John to “*worship God*” (Rev. 22:9).

Fifth, God **designates** how we are to worship him.

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

To worship “*in spirit*” is to pour out the feelings and emotions of one’s heart in sincere devotions to God. Habitual observance of laws and regulations does not necessarily mean that such is worshipping “*in spirit*.” Acts of worship, regardless of the regularity of such performances, must be done in all sincerity, from the heart, with a meaningful purpose. Paul told the Philippians that we are God’s people that worship “*in the spirit*” (Phil. 3:3).

“*In truth*” is essential to true worship. One worships in truth when every purpose and passion of his heart, and when every act of his religious worship, is guided and regulated by the word of God. Worshipping “*in truth*” in our public worship includes teaching God’s word (Acts 2:42), giving (I Cor. 16:1-2), the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 11:17-34), singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), and prayer (Acts 2:42).

## What Kinds Of Worship Will God Not Accept?

First, **vain worship** is unacceptable to God. What

makes worship vain? *“But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matt. 15:9). The Pharisees were worshipping in vain because they were teaching their own commandments and doctrines. They laid aside God’s commandments and substituted their own traditions (Mark 7:8-9). When one adds his own commandments he is led to fear and worship God by the precepts of men—not the will of God.

Second, **worship in ignorance** is unacceptable to God. The people at Athens were very religious. They had altars for all their gods but, lest they miss one, they had erected an altar to the *“unknown God”* (Acts 17:23). Paul made known to them the God they ignorantly worshipped.

Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things (Acts 17:23-25).

Many people today, although not atheists, are worshipping God in ignorance.

Third, **will worship** is unacceptable to God.

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility,



and neglecting of the body; not in any honour  
to the satisfying of the flesh (Col. 2:20-23).

The Colossians were in this danger by wanting to go back to the law. Will worship rejects the authority of Christ (Matt. 28:18). Will worship may show great wisdom and piety, but it has no power with God. Cain was a will worshipper (Gen. 4:5) and so was Saul (I Sam. 15:1, 22).

Fourth, **worship that lacks heart-felt participation** and becomes mere formalism is rejected by God. Formal means “*of or pertaining to the external appearance or form as opposed to real substance...*” (Webster). Formalism means “*scrupulous observance of prescribed forms, especially in religious worship, social life, art, etc*” (Webster).

Worship was reduced to formalism during the days of Isaiah.

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood (Isa. 1:11-15).

Such worship (1) serves no acceptable purpose before God (v. 11), (2) brings no delight to Him (v. 11), (3) has not been required (v. 12), (4) is vain (v. 13), (5) is iniquity (v. 13), (6) is hated of God (v. 14), (7) wearies Him (v. 14), (8) causes Him to hide His eyes from us (v. 15), and (9) keeps Him from hearing our prayers (v. 15).

Amos exhausts the vocabulary of condemnation showing how offensive formalistic worship is to God.

I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols (Amos 5:21-23).

God said, regarding such worship, (1) *"I will not accept"* (v. 22), (2) *"I hate"* (v. 21), (3) *"I despise"* (v. 21), (4) *"I will not regard"* (v. 22), and (5) *"I will not hear"* (v. 23).

When worship is gone through without interest or heart; done for fashion or show; is a mere performance of acts; it honors neither God nor his commands and becomes a mean and distasteful thing to God. **It implies a low and unworthy concept of God** as it imagines that God is unable to read our hearts or he does not care how our hearts are disposed toward him. **It is a species of hypocrisy.** The outward acts are ways of expressing our inward feelings and emotions. If the right feelings and emotions are absent then the acts are hypocritical and deceptive. **It is a desecration of things sacred.** It is nothing short of mockery to bend the knee in prayer, open the mouth

in song, while the thoughts are somewhere else. It would be better not to “*tread the courts of God*” (worship him) than to reduce worship to mere formalism.

### **Some Changes Men Are Trying To Make In Worship**

Men have always wanted to change the way God wants to be worshipped. Cain changed God’s way (Gen. 4); Nadab and Abihu changed the worship (Lev. 10:1-2). Jereboam changed everything about the worship of God (1 Kings 12:25-33). He changed (1) the place (v. 29), (2) the means (vv. 29-30), (3) the time (v. 32), and (4) the priesthood (v. 31).

There are those advocating changes in our worship today. Calvin Warpula said, “*I also believe we should let individuals and congregations use the musical format they like without judging them.*”<sup>5</sup> Rubel Shelly wrote:

The tired, uninspiring event we call worship in traditional churches has to give way to the exhilarating experience of God that exhibits and nourishes life in the worshippers...The church has got to change. If it doesn’t, my kids are not going to stay in it.<sup>6</sup>

**First, singing while observing the Lord’s Supper** is advocated by some today. Hugo McCord writes:

No one who lets the New Testament be his complete guide in religion will sing during the observance of the Lord’s supper, for at the first observance of the Lord’s supper singing was done after the Supper was finished. “And when

they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."<sup>7</sup>

Singing is an act of worship. The Lord's supper is an act of worship. While singing we are to think about the words and teach and admonish one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). While observing the Lord's supper we are to think about the Lord's death and remember what he did for us (Matt. 26:26-28; I Cor. 11:23-29). It seems to me that one act will hinder the other. Furthermore, if we can sing and observe the Lord's supper at the same time, then why don't we add giving, prayer and preaching. Let's just do it all at the same time. If not, why not?

Second, some are promoting **handclapping** during the worship services. This practice is relatively new among churches of Christ. It was borrowed for us from the denominational world, who borrowed it from the entertaining industry.

The rightness or wrongness of an act is determined, not by its antiquity or its novelty, not by who has or has not made it a practice, but whether or not it is in harmony with the teaching of the New Testament.<sup>8</sup>

What have others said about handclapping in worship? In the Gospel Advocate, November 7, 1974, Rubel Shelly wrote these true words (his view would probably be different today):

Singing to the accompaniment of handclapping is coming to be quite common in youth devotions. Although some seem not to realize it, **this is no less wrong than singing with a piano or organ.** Scriptural authorization allows vocal

music only in the worship of God. To beat out the song’s rhythm with one’s hands or on a drum is to add a second type of music (unauthorized) to the worship. If not, why not?

Christians are to “walk by faith” (II Cor. 5:7), which is simply another way of saying that **we do only such things as are authorized in the Word of God** (Rom. 10:17). Shall we abandon this principle and admit rhythm bands into our worship? Such handclapping and leg-slapping is common among the Pentecostals, **but let it not become an accepted practice among us!**<sup>9</sup>

Mel Futrell, using several reliable definitions from Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary and Collie’s Encyclopedia, wrote an article entitled **Handclapping and Worship**. He shows that handclapping is,

rhythmic...percussion music...All this sustains our point that rhythmic handclapping constitutes percussion music and therefore represents an addition to the authorized music of the church.<sup>10</sup>

The argument that “Amen” and “handclapping” are the same is not a sound argument. “Amen” is authorized (I Cor. 14:16), but “handclapping” is not. All of this ignores the fact that worship is to honor God, not to entertain and please ourselves.<sup>11</sup>

## CONCLUSION

“*My Lord and my God*” must be the central part of our worship. He deserves it, desires it, and demands it. God has always told His people how to worship Him and He delights in such worship. But when one departs from God’s way he is displeasing to God and in danger of eternal damnation.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 The King James Version is used unless otherwise indicated.
- 2 Matthew Henry, **Matthew Henry's Commentary in One Volume** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1960), p. 1629.
- 3 Robert Taylor, Jr., **Studies in the Gospel of John** (Abilene, TX: Quality Pub., 1998), p. 277.
- 4 Guy N. Woods, **Gospel Advocate**, July 16, 1959, p. 454.
- 5 Calvin Warpula, **Wineskins**, Vol. 1, No. 10, p. 30.
- 6 Rubel Shelly, Statements made in a speech at the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Dallas, Texas.
- 7 Hugo McCord, "Singing During the Lord's Supper." These are lessons sent directly to me and the ETSP.
- 8 Bobby Duncan, **Vigil**, February, 1997.
- 9 Rubel Shelly, **Gospel Advocate**, November 7, 1974.
- 10 Mel Futrell, **Handclapping and Worship**, in the Shades Mountain bulletin, Shades Mountain, TN.
- 11 There are many more changes being advocated today, but space will not permit a discussion of them. The ones presented should emphasize the seriousness of the problem.

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## Chapter 6

# *“My Lord And My God” And The Eldership*

*B. J. Clarke*



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**W**ith absolutely no desire to sound like a preacher of doom and gloom, I can say, I must say, what many before me have already said—there is a leadership crisis in the Lord’s church today. Consider the problems that are besetting the church of Christ today: ignorance of the Scriptures, worldliness, association and fellowship with denominations, association and fellowship with change agents among us who are seeking to restructure the church of our Lord, a repudiation of God’s teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, the insistence upon an expanded role for women in leading the worship, a failure to practice church discipline, and so on.

The aforementioned problems are directly proportionate to the problems in leadership that the church is facing. However, it is just as true that the solution to the problems facing the church today is to start once again with properly training and educating



church leaders, i.e., elders in the Lord’s church. Please do not misunderstand; I am not suggesting that there are not any good elders in the Lord’s church today. In the first place, I am blessed beyond measure to work with the eldership at the Southaven church of Christ, where I have been privileged to labor for over ten years. Also, in many places, where I have been privileged to travel as a gospel preacher, I have been exposed to high quality men in high quality elderships. I know that many churches are in very capable hands.

Having said that, let’s face it—by and large the church is suffering from anemic leadership. The problem is real, and it will not get better by leaving it alone. On the positive side, there is hope. But what message would, if acted upon, revolutionize the church and its leadership? Actually, a statement made by Thomas in John 20:28, would, if properly understood, revolutionize elderships in the Lord’s church today. Upon seeing the resurrected Lord and Savior, Thomas exclaimed, *“My Lord and my God.”* It is fair to ask why the message of Thomas’ statement would prove to be so revolutionary if elders would truly grasp its significance. The answer is that if elders would truly recognize Jesus as both their Lord and God, then they would realize that they have no choice but to follow His dictates, rather than their own. Simply put, if all shepherds would realize that Jesus is Lord and God, they would also recognize Him as their *“chief Shepherd”* (I Peter 5:4). If all elders would remember that they are merely undershepherds, serving under the chief Shepherd, then they would

not presume to ignore the will of God in order to advance their own agendas, or the agenda being pushed upon them by disgruntled brethren in the church. Elders who honor Jesus as Lord and God value what He values, and desire what He desires.

This, of course, raises the following questions: (1) What does Jesus, our Lord and God, value and esteem? (2) What does Jesus desire? As we peer into the Scriptures for the answers to these questions, we do not have to look very far. More than anything else, Jesus placed a premium upon the value of the soul. Man is more than flesh and blood. He is a spirit housed in a tabernacle of flesh (Gen. 2:7; II Cor. 4:16-5:4; James 2:26). Just how valuable is the soul that man possesses? Jesus said,

For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26).

Think about it! How much money would you have if you could combine Bill Gates, and Ted Turner's bank accounts and assets and deposit it into your own account? From a physical standpoint, you would be wealthy beyond description, but you still would not own all the money in the world. More importantly, even if you could own all of the money in the world, your soul would be more valuable. Take the wealth of the entire world and multiply it by infinity, and you still will not have come close to the value of even one soul.

Perhaps the greatest testimony concerning the

value of the soul is seen in the price that was paid to redeem it. Peter reminded his readers,

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: (I Peter 1:18-19).

So precious is one soul that it took the bloodshed of the very Son of God to redeem it from eternal torment! Jesus purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). He loved the church so much that He gave Himself for it (Eph. 5:25). No wonder Paul told the Corinthians, *“For ye are bought with a price”* (I Cor. 6:20). What a price! If elders would come to each meeting with this fact firmly engrained into their thinking, it would radically alter the make-up of their meetings and the nature of the matters they discuss therein.

Jesus not only taught the value of the soul by His lips, but also by His life. After all, the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which is lost (Luke 19:10). He does not desire for any to perish, not even one soul (II Peter 3:9). He desires for all men to come to a knowledge of the truth, so that they might be saved (I Tim. 2:4).

Having established that Jesus, our Lord and God, values one soul as worth more than the whole world, and having demonstrated that His main desire is to seek and save the lost, we are now in a position to consider how a recognition of this fact would revolutionize elderships for good. Hence, we wish to

fill in the blanks to the following sentence: If elders would truly recognize Jesus as both Lord and God, it would revolutionize their attitude toward \_\_\_\_\_.

## THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

Elders must remember why the church exists. It helps to remember that the church is often equated with the *"body of Christ"* (1 Cor. 12:13ff.; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). Moreover, Christ is the head of His body, the church (Col. 1:18). The body is intended to do whatever the head directs it to do. Thus it should be with the body of Christ. Whatever Christ, the head of the body, directs the body to do, the body must do. We have already noted that Christ came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10). Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (I Tim. 1:15). Consequently, as the church, the body, carries out the wishes of the Head, Jesus Christ, she will do everything within her power to seek and to save the lost. In His infinite wisdom, God purposed that the church might come into existence so that *"He might gather together in one all things in Christ"* (Eph. 1:10). It is apparent that Jesus wants to gather as many souls into His body as possible. No doubt this is why He commanded the apostles to go into all the world and make disciples of every nation by preaching the gospel to every creature (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). The mission of the church, as indicated by the New Testament, is threefold: (1) Evangelism (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16); (2) Edification (Matt. 28:19; Acts 14:23; 20:32); and (3) Benevolence (Matt. 25:31-46; Luke 14:12-14; Acts

2:44-45; 4:32; 6:1-7; 2 Cor. 9:12-13).

Compare the emphasis of many congregations with the aforementioned threefold mission of the church, and you will find an alarming practice gap. The emphasis of so many “*church programs*” today is to satisfy the whims and wishes of the members, even to the point of providing them recreation and entertainment. But, in congregations where there are elders, who is responsible for leading the church in the right direction? Is it not the elders? Yet, some elderships have either encouraged or allowed the church to become nothing more than a glorified YMCA. Instead of growing the church, the old-fashioned way, by sowing the seed of the kingdom, which is the Word of God (Luke 8:11), into the hearts of men, modern day elders have become too sophisticated for that. In attempting to attract numbers, they opt for gimmicks, not the gospel.

Whether we like to admit it or not, “The Willow Creek Mentality” for growing a church has replaced the Lord’s way, at least in the minds of some elders. For those who are unaware, there is a denominational church in Barrington, Illinois, known as the Willow Creek Church. Church members are regularly treated to a 10-piece rock band, and dramatic skits in place of Bible-thumping preaching. Additionally, they have access to tennis courts, bowling alleys, and a fitness area where they can do aerobics and enjoy the spa. While not going as far as Willow Creek has gone, a number of churches have spent more money and effort on building their “*family life centers*” and gymnasiums

than they have on the spread of the gospel. Even in churches which have not gone so far as to use the Lord's money to build what amounts to nothing more than recreational facilities, there is the problem of spending vast amounts of cash for more ornate and impressive facilities in which to worship. A vast number of churches have had "*Million Dollar Sundays*," a Sunday set aside for a special contribution toward the building of a new building. While there is nothing wrong with using the Lord's money to build a meeting place for the Lord's people, there is something wrong with reckless spending just to impress the community with our wealthy appearance. Besides, how many churches have had a "*Million Dollar Sunday*" just for the purpose of raising money to send to missions? The answer to this question offers compelling evidence as to just how many elderships have failed to recognize Jesus as Lord and God. Instead of following His orders to carry out the main mission of evangelizing the lost, edifying the saved, and showing benevolence to all, many an eldership has, in essence, said, "*We're going to follow the way that we think is best, or the way that we are being pressured to go by a few vocal families in the congregation.*"

This is precisely why so many elders have caved in to some of the shenanigans of many "*youth ministers*" working with our young people. In some congregations, it is apparent that the elders are subject to the youth minister. In these churches, the youth minister is given free reign to do anything he wants to do with the young people. In one church that I

know of, the youth minister took the young people from his Wednesday night Bible class outside to play basketball, rather than having class. He did this not once, which would have been bad enough, but every week during the summer months. When some parents complained to the elders about it, they called him in to talk about it. He “*explained*” that this was a good way for the young people to grow closer together. The eldership conceded that it was important for the young people to be close, and allowed the practice to continue!

Brethren, the mission of the church to evangelize the lost and edify the saved includes young people. I am privileged to know some knowledgeable and godly men who work with young people in a splendid way. They have not forgotten that our young people need much more than an activity director. Too many of our youth ministers are serving as nothing more than glorified recreation directors. That is why so many of our young people will remember all the trips to Six Flags, but very few trips to the baptistery to see their friends become Christians. Too many of our youth ministers are exposing our young people to one false teacher after another, as they cart them from one youth rally after another.

But wait just a minute—who is overseeing the work of these youth ministers? Is it not the elders? The fact of the matter is that conscientious and godly elders could put a stop to some of the nonsense going on in the name of youth ministry. You can count on this—if an eldership has the courage to say “*No*” to

some of the things some youth ministers are trying to do, and to say “No” to some of the places and events they want to take our young people to. Some parents are going to squawk about how they are going to find a different church where their young people can get what they need. Upon hearing these threats, some elderships will submit to the wishes of the members rather than remembering to honor the wishes of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus. It is clear that Jesus is not the Lord and God of these elderships, or else they would do what He has directed them to do.

To be fair, we should point out that there are churches of Christ which have not necessarily become obsessed with self-serving ministries. Indeed, some of these churches have placed great emphasis upon the need to be benevolent. Some have opened up soup kitchens to feed the poor and hungry. However, oftentimes churches with this kind of emphasis fail to emphasize the other aspects of the mission of the church. As important as it is for the Lord’s church to practice benevolence, we cannot, we must not exchange the saving gospel for a social gospel. Jesus said, *“Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life”* (John 6:27). If we satisfy man’s physical hunger but fail to feed his soul with the Scriptures, which are able to make one wise unto salvation (II Tim. 3:15), then what eternal good have we really accomplished? At the same time, an examination of many congregational budgets in the Lord’s church reveals a woeful lack of emphasis on benevolence. Regarding this, elders must remember



that when it comes to the church preaching the whole gospel, or assisting the needy, it is not either/or but both/and. In other words, elders who honor Jesus as Lord and God will see to it that the local church over which they shepherd emphasizes evangelism, edification, and benevolence.

### **FALSE DOCTRINE**

Elders who would honor Jesus as both Lord and God will possess the right attitude toward false doctrine. They will remember that souls can only be purified by obedience to the truth (I Peter 1:22). They will remember that it is only the truth that makes men free (John 8:32), and that those who believe a lie will be damned (Gen. 3:1-6; 2 Thess. 2:10-13; Cf. I Kings 13). Godly elders will remember that they have a God-given responsibility to protect the flock from false teachers. Paul said as much in Acts 20:28-32:

Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

Elders who honor Jesus as Lord and God will heed the words of Titus 1:9-14:

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.

Although it is not pleasant, elders must give specific warnings to the flock, in order to protect them from false teachers, who appear as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15). Jesus did not hesitate to identify the Pharisees and Sadducees by name, and to warn His disciples to beware of their doctrine (Matt. 16:6). Elders who honor Jesus as Lord and God will feel the same way that He felt (and feels) about denominations. Jesus said, *"Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up"* (Matt. 15:13). Elders who seek to honor the Chief Shepherd will recognize the need to warn the flock about false brethren (I Tim. 1:3, 18-20; 6:3-5; Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9). There are times when a vague and general warnings simply will not do. Suppose a TV news anchor came on and said,

Ladies and Gentlemen, we wish to inform you of breaking news. Six convicts have escaped from the maximum security prison in which they were

incarcerated. These men are armed and dangerous. We would like to give you their names, and show you their pictures, but we are afraid that would hurt their feelings, and we don't want to be unloving. However, remember to be on the look out for these dangerous men.

What would your reaction be to such a broadcast? You would be outraged! The safety of your family is more important than the feelings of dangerous men who pose a threat to your family. Likewise, the welfare of the family of God is more important than the feelings of some false teachers whose doctrines pose a great threat to the welfare of the body of Christ!

Because error will damn the soul, elders must not compromise with purveyors of error. It has been said before, and I repeat it here again—elders could help stop false doctrine in its tracks if they would quit providing a forum for false teachers by inviting them/their literature into the local church. They could thwart the spread of false doctrine if they would quit announcing the meetings of other congregations where false teachers are being used. It is not enough to avoid teaching error; we must also refuse to help and assist those who do. The question of Jehu to Jehoshaphat needs to be heard loud and clear by many elders in the Lord's church today: *“Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord?”* (II Chron. 19:2). Indeed, elderships who honor Jesus as Lord and God will *“buy the truth, and sell it not”* (Prov. 23:23).

## **FEED THE FLOCK A WELL-BALANCED DIET**

We noted earlier Paul's charge to the Ephesian

elders to “*feed the flock.*” Peter instructed elders to “*feed the flock which is among you*” (I Peter 5:2). Godly elders know that the soul must be nourished with the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27-32; I Tim. 4:6). What would you think of a mother who did not see to it that her child received proper nourishment? What does the Lord think of shepherds who fail to feed properly the flock which is among them?

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD...And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD. For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourneth; the pleasant places of the wilderness are dried up, and their course is evil, and their force is not right...I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah...I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings (Jer. 23:1-2, 4, 10, 14, 21-22).

Before leaving this point, we should note that a well-balanced diet of preaching includes both positive and negative preaching. Which pole is essential to the proper operation of a car battery? The positive pole, or the negative pole? Obviously, both are needed. Likewise, in feeding the flock, shepherds need to see to it that both positive and negative lessons are presented. It is wrong to be lopsided in either direction. Some brethren attend services week after week, never hearing anything but *“sugar, and spice, and everything nice.”* They are never rebuked from the pulpit, nor challenged to rise to new and better heights of service. They are never warned of the impending dangers of practicing immorality. They will never hear a sermon on the subject of hell. In fact, in some churches they will never even hear the word mentioned. They will never hear the truth preached on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. They leave services, week after week, empty, and malnourished. On the other hand, there are instances where brethren attend services, week after week, only and always to be reminded of what is wrong with them, and the church. They are always rebuked and never commended. They hear much about hell, and little about heaven. They are constantly reminded of the sacrifices required of the Christian, but rarely reminded of the awesome blessings of being a Christian. These brethren leave services, week after week, discouraged and defeated.

Elders who want to honor God will not allow such an imbalance to continue, in either direction.

They will insist that all of God's Word be taught to boys and girls, and men and women of all ages.

## **SEEKING AND RESTORING WAYWARD SHEEP**

If elders truly believe that Jesus is their Lord and God, then they will want to be like Him, as much as possible. Consequently, they will give serious attention to the following words which fell from the lips of our Lord:

And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (Luke 15:4-7).

Elders must seek wayward sheep and endeavor to bring them to safety. It has often been noted that if all of the wayward members of the church within just a few miles of our church buildings were to all be restored at once, that our auditoriums would be packed to capacity and overflowing. We have emphasized baptism, and rightly so. However, it is not enough to baptize the lost into a state of salvation and membership in the Lord's church. We must then teach them to observe all things that the Lord has

taught (Matt. 28:19). Far too many churches have practiced a “*dip ‘em and drop ‘em*” style of evangelism. We dip them in water, announce it from the pulpit, and in the bulletin, and then let them fend for themselves. As shepherds of the sheep, and leaders of the flock, elders need to make sure that new babes in Christ continue to be fed, nourished, and strengthened. Then, if they begin to drift away, elders must be vigilant to observe this before they have wandered so far away that coming home is more and more difficult. While it is true that elders have the authority to make decisions concerning the building and grounds, and administration of the daily aspects of church work, elders must not forget that, first and foremost, they are shepherds. If elders constantly remind themselves that even one soul is worth more than the whole world, then many of their meetings will be dominated by discussion of what can be done to bring home wandering sheep.

Furthermore, the goal of reclaiming lost sheep may ultimately lead to the need to exercise church discipline. The church at Corinth had failed to withdraw its fellowship from the man who had his father’s wife. Rather than dealing with this lost brother, they patted themselves on the back for being so tolerant. Paul told them that they should rather have mourned and delivered such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 5:1-5). Note that the stated purpose of church discipline is to attempt to save the soul of the wayward child of God.

Let's face it—the number of churches of Christ who are consistently practicing church discipline today can probably be counted without needing very many digits. Sometimes, a church will remember back to a decade ago when they did practice discipline, and act as if that still counts them among the faithful churches practicing it today. A few, isolated occasions, in the past, of practicing church discipline will not make up for our failure to practice it in the present. Brethren, this is a matter of honoring Jesus as both Lord and God. If Jesus truly is the Lord and God, then how can we so blatantly ignore His teaching on the need to withdraw ourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly (II Thess. 3:6, 14)? If Jesus is Lord, then let us say *“Yes, Lord, we will practice church discipline, even if it is difficult, because we recognize that You are both Lord and God, and You know much more than we do about the effectiveness of church discipline in restoring the lost. Lord, even though many tell us that it will do nothing but drive people further away, we will trust You and Your wisdom above our think-so's, or the opinions of other men.”* If elders truly grasped the value of one soul, and the horrors of even one soul being lost in hell, then they would be much more willing and aggressive in seeking wayward sheep, even to the point of practicing church discipline as a last resort in trying to reclaim them.

## CONCLUSION

We have endeavored to show that if elders truly honor Jesus as Lord and God, then they will



realize how valuable one soul is. If they realize this, it will revolutionize their attitude toward (1) The mission of the church; (2) The dangers of false doctrine; (3) The need for a well-balanced diet of God’s Word; and (4) The urgency of seeking wayward sheep.

Those of us who serve under elders ought to be reminded of Hebrews 13:17:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

Thank God for elders who do regard Jesus as both Lord and God, and may their tribe increase!

## Chapter 7

# *“My Lord And My God”* **In The Pulpit**

*Keith A. Mosher, Sr.*



Keith Mosher, Sr., a faithful proclaimer of the gospel of Christ, received his formal education from Cleveland State University, University of Louisville, and Memphis School of Preaching ~ Author of **The Book “God Breathed”** ~ Presently he is an instructor at the Memphis School of Preaching ~ Keith and Dorothy have been married thirty three years and have three children and two grandchildren.

**M**ost of the outstanding contributions being made, today, in the field of Bible study are found in brotherhood lectureships. The bookshelves of my office are replete with commentaries on every Bible book and countless theological subjects which studies are all products of church lecture series. The brethren at East Hill have generously bestowed on a grateful brotherhood immensely valuable studies on the home, Christian endurance, Christian soldiers, eschatology, evangelism, fundamentals, etcetera. I, among a multitude, am deeply grateful to the East hill elders and especially to Paul Sain for such rich and rewarding materials. East Hill is very dear to my heart, for I have had so many, and varied, experiences in being associated with the good brethren there. To be invited to speak, again, on this year’s series, is another wonderful privilege for me. May our Father richly bless all who take part.

## INTRODUCTION

Batsell Barrett Baxter quoting George A. Buttrick, (who was a teacher at Yale University Divinity School) concerning the demands of successful preaching wrote:

What is the secret of real influence in a preacher?—we asked. Is it physical vitality? That is a factor, we agreed; it gives real blood to a sermon, and infects the listener with health and cheer. Is it mental keenness? That also is an asset: a sharp intellectual scythe is better in the time of harvest than a dull blade. But these questions left us still on the circumference of the quest. Two men of equal energy and equal mind might be imagined preaching the same sermon: in one case it might fall dead at his feet, and in the other flame like a torch. Character then—is that the answer? Not in any obvious meaning of the word: two preachers might be of equally good character, so far as eye could judge, and one carry conviction and the other leave his congregation almost inert.<sup>1</sup>

Baxter continued to comment on Buttrick’s quote by asking, “*What is the secret of real influence in the pulpit?*”<sup>2</sup> Brooks has defined preaching as the “*communication of truth by man to men.*”<sup>3</sup> Since man is entrusted with such an enormous task, what are some of the necessary elements required to portray Lord and God in a pulpit? (See II Cor. 4:7).

To facilitate a practical approach to finding power in the pulpit three areas will be discussed here. (1) The preacher’s efforts to bring **praise** to God in preaching. (2) The preacher’s **polemical** responsibilities in the pulpit. (3) The **practical** aspects of the sermon, which elements bring power in preaching.

Perhaps one should begin a study of God and the pulpit by keeping in mind something Browne wrote:

A minister of the word who writes about preaching writes as a learner to other learners and like them...is haunted by the sermon that no one is great enough to preach.<sup>4</sup>

### MY LORD AND MY GOD: AND PRAISE

Oxnam, in commenting on the persuasive power needed in preaching, illustrated his point from the life of Phillips Brooks *"whose preaching moved the hearts and minds of his generation and whose message was heard across the seas."*<sup>5</sup> Oxnam noted that Brooks spoke *"torrentially"* but also gave emphasis to *"the poor and the rich, the weak and the strong, the untutored and the scholar."*<sup>6</sup> Before one ever gets in a pulpit that one **must** love men's souls and **must** be ready to serve men's needs. Jesus insisted that Christians glorified God by good **works seen** of men (Matt. 5:14-16). The preacher who steps in a pulpit without being the recognized servant of the people will **never** influence men to praise the Lord and God and that preacher, once he leaves the pulpit, should not re-enter unless and/or until he does love the people to whom he is preaching.

Preachers are **worship** leaders and worship leaders must love God **and** neighbor (Matt. 22:37-40).<sup>7</sup> There are at least five essentials in leading a congregation, from the pulpit, in praising God.

First, one must preach God and not self. Paul

wrote: *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake"* (II Cor. 4:5). In order to preach God one must quote scripture; otherwise God is **not** allowed to speak and no faith will be produced in the hearts of listeners (Rom. 10:17; Heb. 4:2). It is extremely disheartening to hear someone say that some preacher used *"too many scriptures"* in his sermon, yet such comments as the foregoing are frequently heard. Unless God is **heard**, God cannot be known. Jesus, while praying to the Father, connected knowledge of God to the Word of God: *"I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: (the apostles, K. M.) thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word"* (John 17:6). Philip such a view (John 10:9-10). The preacher must let his hearers *"see"* God by quoting the Word of God.

In the second place, the preacher must preach in such a manner that the listener is introduced to God as Lord. The Hebrew term, YHWH, (often called the tetragrammaton) is transliterated from the Masoretic text as Jehovah or Yahweh in the American Standard (e.g. Gen. 2:5) and **Lord** in the King James Version (e.g. Gen. 2:5). It is interesting to know that the ancient Jews would **never** pronounce YHWH when they came to the term while reading the text.<sup>8</sup> Instead they said **Adonai**, meaning *"Lord."*<sup>9</sup> Why did they refrain from audibilizing YHWH? The Jews considered the name too **sacred** to pronounce.<sup>10</sup> Many, today, who stand in the pulpit seem to have a sense of God as **Lord**; of God as sacred, holy, and transcendent. Thus, listeners

seem to feel free to sleep, pass notes, whisper, move about, and a host of other things while the preacher speaks. No one seems to realize that the Lord is to be praised not the lesson nor the “preacher.”

Perhaps the very term “lesson” illustrates what is wrong when the preacher fails to present the Lord to the people. A **lesson** is instruction, rebuke; a reading or exercise given to a student.<sup>11</sup> A sermon, on the other hand, is instructive, but the teaching makes a demand on the hearer to obey.<sup>12</sup> Thus a sermon brings the **Lord** to the hearer’s attention and hearts are in awe and are stirred to obey YHWH. Peter commanded that “*if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God...*” (I Peter 4:11a). The term, **oracles**, (found also in Acts 7:38; Rom. 3:2; and Heb. 5:12) is from **logios** and can be thought of as a **divine saying**.<sup>13</sup> When a preacher is standing in a pulpit, he is to speak **as** an oracle; that is, as one who knows the Lord and **as** one who knows that **divine sayings** are being spoken. The Lord of the universe is being introduced to the congregation and He is “*greatly to be feared*” in the assembly of the saints (Psm. 89:7; 34:9).<sup>14</sup>

In the third place, preachers need fully to realize that God is to be praised during worship and that service is a time of devotion to duty and not a time for “lecture.” Many sermons are so devoid of heart-felt devotion to God that it is nearly impossible for the listener to worship. When Jesus, after His resurrection, had finished explaining the scriptures concerning Him to two disciples whom Jesus found walking the road to Emmaus, they said:

Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures? (Luke 24:32).

For purposes of illustration of this third point, suppose that in a given congregation there have been two deaths, several surgeries, a divorce, and three pronouncements of terminal illness among the members during the past week. Suppose the “*minister*” decides that that very Sunday he will preach on premillennialism! Will the pulpit be a place of devotion or “*lecture?*” Please understand that premillennialism needs exposing, but one in the pulpit needs to **see** the people not just faces and needs to help those folks to rise above their very real difficulties in order to worship. Christians in this world are bombarded with things evil and distressing. A pulpit that is used to help such disciples praise the Godhead should not become another point of distress for those brethren. The pulpit is **the** place to begin to lead the worshippers in paying homage to God.

In the fourth place the preacher who understands his role as a worship leader will endeavor to guide the congregation into the “*presence*” of God. In a practical way such guidance requires coordination between the song-leader and the preacher. Thousands of songs have been sung that are disconnected from the sermon (or vice-versa) simply because the preacher did not inform the song-leader of the contents of the message. In a theological way, guiding the congregation into the “*presence*” of God requires a deep knowledge of scripture and a total grasp of the

meaning of the holy writings. “*Preach the word*” is not just a catch-phrase for quoting a few verses, but is an admonition from God to handle His Word correctly (II Tim. 4:2; II Cor. 4:2; II Tim. 2:15). A young preacher was heard, by this writer, exhorting his brethren to bring every thought into captivity to Christ. The young preacher’s text was II Corinthians 10:5. After the sermon (?) the young man was distressed that “*no one came forward.*” The problem lay with the preacher, however, not the listeners. The II Corinthians passage is the record of what the apostle Paul intended to do to false teachers, not what Christians ought to be doing to themselves. That young preacher, by using the verse out of context, had failed to take his audience to the presence of God. The pulpit is a place only for earnest, first-hand thinkers who do actual, critical work on the text before delivering the message. (Emile Zola was once asked about his writing of a novel. He replied that having compiled seventeen hundred pages of notes, his book was finished; he had only to write it.)<sup>15</sup> When the preacher has “*met*” God in His Word, then, and only then, is the preacher ready to introduce the Lord to the congregation. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who was miraculously commissioned to preach, unlike preachers today who are not directly called by God, nevertheless is an illustration of how a preacher must espy the glory of God **before** telling others:

In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with



twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me (Isa. 6:1-8).

In the fifth place, a preacher bent on being a worship leader will preach the holiness of God. Moses and the Israelites, after being freed from the Egyptians, sang: *“Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders”* (Exod. 15:11)? Ezra reminded the people of his day to: *“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness”* (1 Chron. 16:29, cf. Psm. 29:2). The psalmist insisted that *“God reigneth over the heathen: God sitteth upon the throne of his holiness”* (Psm. 47:8) and that *“Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in the mountain of his holiness”* (Psm. 48:1). Isaiah prophesied that the new Testament church would be a *“way of*

*Holiness*” and Paul would write that Christians perfect or complete holiness “*in the fear of the God*” (Isa. 35; II Cor. 7:1). Sermons devoid of holiness are messages without God. The pulpit is not a place for innuendo, profaneness, frivolity, nor acting. The pulpit is a place where a holy God is to be revered. Havergal penned:

Lord, speak to me, that I may speak  
In living echoes of Thy tone;  
As thou hast sought, so let me seek  
Thy erring children lost and lone.

O teach me, Lord, that I may teach  
The precious things thou dost impart;  
And wing my words that they may reach  
The hidden depths of many a heart.

O lead me, Lord, that I may lead  
The wondering and wavering feet;  
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed  
The hungering ones with manna sweet.

O strengthening me, that while I stand  
Firm on the rock and strong in Thee;  
I may stretch out a loving hand  
to wrestle with the troubled sea.

O fill me with Thy fullness, Lord,  
Until my very heart o'er flow'  
In kindling thought and glowing word,  
Thy love to tell, Thy praise to show.

O use me, Lord, use even me,  
Just as thou wilt, and when, and where;  
Until thy blessed face I see,  
Thy rest, Thy joy, Thy glory share.<sup>16</sup>

## MY LORD AND MY GOD: AND THE POLEMICAL

Broadus has remarked concerning the way an audience is to be approached that one is “*not to speak before the people, but to them and (one) must earnestly strive to make them take to themselves what we say.*”<sup>17</sup> However, a preacher is to contend for the faith (Jude 3) and be set for the defense of sound doctrine (Phil. 1:17). A preacher is also to convert and to challenge (Acts 2:36-39). How can one defend, convert, and challenge and still set forth the Lord and talk to the audience not just talk in front of it? Park recommends a “*common-ground*” approach:

It is clear that mere scolding is out of place in the pulpit. Under a rain of denunciation most modern hears put up their umbrellas and let the drips run on to their neighbor’s shoulders. It is better to lead the congregation along, starting with certain general principles to which they gladly assent and then applying these to unexpected special instances, and modestly implying how it is possible to escape the obvious applications.<sup>18</sup>

Park’s suggested approach may hint at cowardice on the preacher’s part in the minds of some, but the apostle Paul did use the approach of “*being all things to all men that he might by all means save some*” (I Cor. 9:22).

It is the case, in the first place, that the pulpit must be set for the defence of the gospel (Phil. 1:17). The term, **defence**, is from **apologia** and when the latter term is applied to a thing it means a speech of

defence.<sup>19</sup> Paul applied **apologia** to his first court appearance in Rome (II Tim. 4:16; cf. II Cor. 7:11) and to his defence of the gospel (Phil. 1:7, 17). Modern preachers have a special difficulty here. Sclater remarks:

To make our faith credible: to convince the minds of our hearers that God, and sin and love and the indwelling spirit (a denominational idea, K.M.) are **facts** here is the dignified enterprise on which we may embark Sunday by Sunday, knowing that, if can succeed, the immediate object of preaching has been achieved. Once a man is convinced of a truth he is strengthened with might. And have we not sadly to admit that our modern preaching is weak here, compared with the standards of former days? No doubt, we have a harder task than our fathers, who could clinch a doubtful argument with a "proof-text." No doubt, knowledge has grown from more to more, and the modern, intelligent congregation cannot be put off with half-reasoning. But have we not shrunk from our task because it is hard, instead of regarding its difficulty as a challenge? The fact remains that the condition of sustained, effective preaching is wide knowledge and good, hard thinking: and that young ministers must scorn the sophistry that tells them that their congregations will not listen to theological sermons. The truth is the exact opposite—they will not listen long to anything else. Of course, the language must not be the technical language of the classrooms of a by-gone age: but theology expressed in comprehensible speech is essential. After all, what is theology but considered common sense applied to the meaning of life and the relations

of God and man? Let us pay our congregations the very slight compliment of believing them to be rational beings who want to know, and who hold that “Thought is to be citadel.” Unless we stiffen our preaching, and replace the iron of argument in it, the Reformed Church will die of pernicious anaemia.<sup>20</sup>

Although Sclater’s denominational language and understanding of the church leave a great deal to be desired, he makes a valid point. Simply because modern audiences are not attuned to theological language (i.e., the Bible) is no reason to abandon preaching the text. In fact, modern audiences need such preaching more than ever.

It is the case, in the second place that the polemical aspect of preaching “*my Lord and my God*” requires preaching to convert. Hopefully listeners will be moved as those were on Pentecost when they heard Peter explain that Jesus had been executed by the very ones to whom Peter was preaching:

Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves

from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls (Acts 2:36-41).

While studying the conversion aspect of preaching one who delivers sermons week after week should keep in mind for what purpose one is preaching. Beecher asked:

What would you think of a physician in the household who has been called to minister to a sick member of some family, and who says, "Well, I will leave something or other; I don't know; what shall I leave?" and he looks in his saddle-bags to see what he has yet got the most of, and prescribes it with no directions; the father, mother, and children may all take a little, and the servants may have the rest. Another physician, and a true one, comes, and the mother says, "Doctor, I have called you in to prescribe for my child." He sits down and studies the child's symptoms; traces them back to the supposed cause; reflects how he shall hit that case, what remedial agents are supposed to be effective, what shall be the form of administration, how often; he considers the child's temperament and age, and adapts himself to the special necessity of the individual case!<sup>21</sup>

Of course, one would not retain a doctor who handed out medicine indiscriminately nor should one retain a preacher who has no idea for what purpose he has prepared his sermon. A homiletics teacher has urged his students to think of conversion in their preaching by establishing the following scenario in his classroom: the teacher has a student pretend to be the fleshly

brother of another pupil. The teacher then explains that one is the preacher and the other is the lost soul. The “preacher” student is told that if his “fleshly” brother leaves the room before he is converted, someone is standing in the hallway waiting to **kill** the “fleshly” brother. “Now,” the preacher student is told, “Preach to your brother!” Preaching requires a purpose.

It is the case, in the third place that preaching “my Lord and my God” requires challenging the audience. The apostle, Paul, is recorded as having entered numbers of synagogues of the Jews and having reasoned with them “out of the scriptures” (e.g. Acts 17:2). Paul also challenged the secular philosophers of his day along with admonishing false brethren (Acts 17:22-31; II Cor. 10:1-6). The motivation behind such preaching was always the **care** and **love** Paul had for souls (Rom. 9:1-2; II Cor. 11:28).

### MY LORD AND MY GOD: AND THE PRACTICAL

In the first place, as emphasized above, one is to “preach the word” (II Tim. 4:2). The term translated **preach** is **keerusoo** and indicates a herald who is under obligation not to alter the **public** message the “keerux” is delivering.<sup>22</sup>

In the second place, one is to preach the Word in its context. No matter how much this latter point is emphasized some continue to remove verses from their historical, literary context. A few examples of such contextual mismanagement will suffice:

- (1) Some preachers are forever using I

Thessalonians 5:22 to argue against doing anything that “*appears*” to be evil. Such an admonition is honorable and other passages (e.g. I Cor. 6:12) teach such a principle, but the II Thessalonians passage has another meaning. Paul (the human penman of I Thessalonians) was writing to a people who were used to **lists** of commands as are found in the text of I Thessalonians chapter five from verses twelve through twenty-seven. (In many cities the people could go to a public place and read lists of orders from Caesar or some other leader.) There is a continuity in the verses in I Thessalonians, however, from verses nineteen through twenty-two.

In verses nineteen one reads, “*Quench not the Spirit,*” then immediately reads “*Despise not prophesying*” (I Thess. 5:19-20). Prophesying was one of the miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit, which gifts were done away at the completion of the revelation of the New Testament (I Cor. 12:10; 13:8-13). Evidently false prophets were causing the Thessalonians to despise all teaching. Paul’s admonition is to listen to the message of the prophet, but then “*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*” (I Thess. 5:21). What should one do if false teaching “*appears*” in the message? “*Abstain from all appearance of evil*” (I Thess. 5:22). The word, **appearance** is **eidōs** (Greek-**kind**)<sup>23</sup> and when such evil (Greek-**ponēroō**)<sup>24</sup> is known in “*kind*” one needs to reject it. The admonition, contextually preached, is edifying. Christians are challenged to listen, prove, and “*spit out the briars*” when false teaching is found in the prophesying.<sup>25</sup>

(2) Another passage very often removed from its



literary context is Romans 10:18:

But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.

Some will read the foregoing verse and chide the Bible by asking whether the early Christians preached in China or some other place. The verse, in context, is a reference to the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament whose “*sound*” or voice about the bringing in of the Gentiles into the promised church went to the whole Jewish world (See Rom. 10:20-21).

(3) In the same context in Romans 10, Paul mentions some preachers who were “*sent*” (Rom. 10:15). Again, the context is the Old Testament prophets who had not preached concerning the New Testament church without having been sent (i.e. inspired) by God so to do. Context helps one properly to understand and, further, context is absolutely necessary in preaching so that the passage accomplishes what God intended the passage to accomplish (Isa. 55:11).

In the third place one is to preach in order to edify and in order to build up the congregation one must keep its members in mind through preparing the sermon and in delivering the sermon. Jowett has an interesting method for keeping his sermon’s purpose in mind:

When I have got any theme clearly defined, and I begin to prepare its exposition, I keep in the circle of my mind at least a dozen men and women, very varied in their natural temperaments, and very dissimilar in their daily

circumstances. These are not mere abstractions. Neither are they dolls or dummies. They are real men and women whom I know: professional people, trading people, learned and ignorant, rich and poor. When I am preparing my work, my mind is constantly glancing round this invisible circle, and I consider how I can so serve the bread of this particular truth as to provide welcome nutriment for all....You may not like my method: it probably would not suit you, and you may devise a better: but at any rate it does this for me,—in all my preparation it keeps me in actual touch with life, with real men and women, moving in the common streets, exposed to life's varying weathers, the "garish day," and the cold night, the gentle dew and the driving blast. It keeps me on the common earth: it saves me from losing myself in the clouds. Gentlemen, our messages must be related to life, to lives, and we must make everybody feel that our key fits the lock of his own private door.<sup>26</sup>

Those who preach must edify real people with real lives and real problems. Preaching is not an abstract art. Paul wrote,

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus (Col. 1:27-28).

## CONCLUSION

A beloved fellow-teacher, Richard Curry, used to say that some preachers who get in the pulpit ought

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never to get out and some preachers who get out of the pulpit ought never to reenter. Unless a man is willing to devote the whole of his psyche, will, strength, and love to the task; preaching is not for him.

To preach God as Lord requires being a leader in praise to God and requires being ready to defend, convert, challenge and edify the listeners. Who is sufficient for such an enormous task (II Cor. 2:16)? God's man is.

### ENDNOTES

1 Batsell Barrett Baxter, "Introduction," in **The Heart of the Yale Lectures** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, reprint, 1969), p. 5.

2 Ibid.

3 Phillips Brooks, "Lectures On Preaching," **Yale Lectures On Preaching 1877** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 5.

4 Robert E. C. Browne, **The Ministry of the Word** (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 15.

5 G. Bromley Oxnam, **Preaching in a Revolutionary Age** (New York: Abingdon Press, 1944), p. 148.

6 Ibid.

7 **The Holy Bible, King James Version** (World Bible Publishers). All scriptural references are to this version unless otherwise specified.

8 J. Weingreen, **A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew** (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 23.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 "*lesson*" in **Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary** (Springfield, MA: G. and C. Merriam, 1972), p. 23.

12 Members of practice, of Christ have fallen into the habit of speaking of the preacher's "lessons." This, it seems here, has contributed to another practice whereby the congregation "evaluates" the preacher on how well he delivers his "lessons."

13 Walter Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature**, 2d ed., rev. Wm. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker (Chicago: Univ. of Press, 1979), p. 476.

14 By long observation this writer has noticed that many will be reverent when prayer is being led, but when scripture is preached the same ones who were respectful and fervent during the prayer will not be so during the sermon. Does this mean that when the congregation speaks to God that such a moment is due more reverence than during the time God is speaking through His Word?

15 Found in G. Campbell Morgan, **Preaching** (Edinburg: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1960), p. 60.

16 Found in J. Daniel Bauman, **An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990), pp. 36-37. The author of the poem is Frances R. Havergal.

17 John A. Broadus, **A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons** (New York: Smith Inc., rev. ed., 1930), p. 245.

18 John Edgar Park, **The Miracle of Preaching** (New York: MacMillan, 1936), p. 46.

19 Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon**, p. 96.

20 J. R. P. Sclater, **The Public Worship of God** (New York: Doran Co., 1927), p. 199.

21 Henry Ward Beecher, **Yale Lectures on Preaching** (New York: Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, 1892), pp. 5-6.

22 Bauer, **A Greek-English Lexicon**.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 221.

24 Ibid., pp. 690-691.

25 The careful reader of I Thessalonians 5:16-22 will notice that “*Quenching the Spirit*” would be done by refusing to listen to prophesying or teaching not by some subjective refusal to resist an imagined nudging by the Holy Spirit.

26 J. H. Lowell, **The Preacher: His Life and Work** (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), pp. 136-137.

## Chapter 8

# *“My Lord And My God”* In Interpretation Of The Word

*Dave Miller*



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**W**hat do people mean by the statement, *“That’s just your interpretation”*? Many mean:

You have your view of what the passage means and I have mine. Who’s to say mine’s wrong and yours is right? We should not condemn each others’ views. We should allow each other to hold different views.

But what does the Bible say?

We live in a *“pluralistic”* society. *“Pluralism”* simply means that differing, even conflicting, views are equally valid. This attitude is very prevalent in today’s world. Television talk shows constantly stress that no absolutes exist. Truth is subjective and relative to many people. They insist that there are very few, if any, definites—very little black and white, but a lot of gray area. The matter is further muddled by the

fact that on any religious or moral question, there are knowledgeable, sincere authorities on both sides of the issue. The general posture of the American mindset is that since truth is so elusive, no one should be judgmental of anyone else; no one should be so arrogant or dogmatic as to insist that a certain viewpoint is the only right viewpoint.

Without even examining God's word, we ought to be able to see that this attitude and this position is self-contradictory and unacceptable. Why? Because those who espouse it insist that they are correct. They are dogmatic in their insistence that no one should be dogmatic. They hold as absolute and certain truth the fact that there are no absolute truths. Therefore, they have to deny their viewpoint in order to hold their viewpoint!

Only in religion do people take the foolish position that truth is elusive and unattainable. Only in the task of interpreting the Bible do people take the position that truth is relative, always changing, and something we can never be sure of. We human beings reason in religion in a way that differs from the way we reason in every other facet of our lives.

For example, when we go to the doctor because we are not feeling well, we communicate to him our symptoms and expect him to understand us. We expect him to gather all the relevant evidence (the verbal information we give as well as the signs our bodies manifest) and then properly interpret that evidence to draw the right conclusions concerning our ailment and proper treatment. He then writes down

a prescription which we take to the pharmacist and once again we expect the pharmacist to interpret properly the doctor's instructions. We take the prescription home and read the label, fully expecting to understand the directions. The fact that doctors and pharmacists can make mistakes by drawing unwarranted conclusions about our condition does not change the fact that if they gather sufficient evidence and reason properly about the information, they can know the truth about our situation.

Every single day that we live, we interpret thousands of messages accurately. You read the newspaper, fully expecting to understand what you are reading. You read novels with the same expectation. You watch the news on television, you go to the mailbox and get your mail and browse through it, fully expecting to interpret properly the messages being conveyed to you. The fact that misunderstanding sometimes occurs, does not negate the fact that more information can be examined in order to draw the right conclusions and arrive at correct interpretations.

We go through this process constantly every waking hour of the day, day in and day out, year after year. We give ourselves credit for having the ability to operate sensibly and communicate with one another intelligibly. Yet we turn right around and imply that the God of heaven, the one who created our minds and our thinking capacity, the one who is infinitely wiser and more capable than humans, is incapable of making His will known to humanity in



a clear and understandable fashion! When we come to the Bible, we suddenly do an about face and insist that we can't be sure what God's will is, we must not be dogmatic on doctrine, we must allow for differing opinions on what is spiritually right and wrong!

Was the Bible written by God through inspired men with the purpose of making known His will for us? Did God have the Bible written in such a way that we can grasp the meanings which He intended to convey? The Bible declares, "yes." God has given man written revelation with the understanding that it can be correctly comprehended. This means that for every teaching, for every passage, for every verse, for every word in the Bible, there is a meaning that God originally intended to convey. That's what Peter meant when he said, "*No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation*" (2 Peter 1:20—NKJV). He meant that men did not decide what information to include in inspired material—God did. God has given every responsible human being the task of ascertaining that one correct interpretation. There is only one correct interpretation to any given passage—the right one, God's view!

### MY LORD AND MY GOD

Let us return to the New Testament and to Jesus Christ Himself. Let us examine the very approach which Jesus took in interpreting Scripture. Let us discover what attitude Jesus had toward truth and revelation. Let us consider how the Master Himself employed Scripture to face the assaults of those who

would deter Him from conformity to the will of God. Then let us *“go and do likewise.”*

Jesus’ own approach to interpretation may be viewed in terms of His attitude toward Scripture and His actual use of Scripture. Concerning His attitude toward Scripture, several elements emerge from His life on earth.

### **JESUS’ ATTITUDE TOWARD SCRIPTURE**

1. Jesus clearly considered Scripture to be divinely inspired through human instrumentality. He attributed David’s words in Psalm 110:1 to the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36). He treated Daniel’s prophecy in Daniel 9:27 as an inspired prediction which would most certainly come true (Matt. 24:15). On the very day that He visited the synagogue in Nazareth and read aloud from Isaiah chapter sixty-one, He declared the passage fulfilled in their hearing (Luke 4:21). He maintained that Scripture’s affirmation that Elijah was to precede the Messiah’s appearance (Mal. 4:5) was exactly what transpired (Mark 9:11-13).

At His arrest, He asked Peter two questions, the second of which further confirmed His belief in the inspiration of Scripture: “But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Matt. 26:54). He attributed His selection of Judas as the inevitable fulfillment of Psalm 41:9 (John 13:18). Indeed, He was so sure of the inspiration of the Old Testament that even at His death, He quoted Psalm 22:1 (Matt. 27:46). Clearly, Jesus recognized Scripture as originating in Heaven in the mind of God, thus

imparting a controlling unity to the whole of Scripture. To Jesus, the Old Testament from Genesis to Malachi was inspired of God.

Jesus consistently manifested sympathy with the idea that Scripture has been preserved from error and is the word of God in all of its parts. Not only did He receive and use the predictive elements of Old Testament Scripture, but He acknowledged the credibility of the didactic and historical portions as well. Daniel's historicity (Mark 13:14), Jonah's fish experience (Matt. 12:40), the divine creation of Adam and Eve (Matt. 19:4), the reality of Noah and the Flood (Luke 17:26-27), Lot and the destruction of Sodom as well as the fate of Lot's wife (Luke 17:29,32), the widow, famine, and drought of Elijah's day (Luke 4:25-26), and the leprous Syrian commander, Naaman (Luke 4:27) — all attest to the fact that to Jesus Scripture was inspired fully "*in all of its parts.*" The credibility of the inspired writers was unquestioned and their literary productions contained no mistakes.

Old Testament inspiration for Jesus extended to the verbal expression of the thoughts of the sacred writers. Jesus clearly embraced this understanding of the matter. He based His powerful, penetrating defense of the reality of the resurrection of the dead upon the tense of the grammar of Exodus 3:6. If God was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the very moment He was speaking to Moses, though the three had already died, then they must still be existing beyond the grave (Matt. 22:32).<sup>1</sup> The argument depends upon God having worded His statement to

convey contemporaneity.

When Jesus challenged the Pharisees to clarify the identity of the Messiah, He focused upon David's use of the single term "Lord" in Psalm 110:1 – "If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matt. 22:45). His whole point depends upon verbal inspiration. On yet another occasion, Jesus was on the verge of being stoned by angry Jews because He identified Himself with deity. His defense was based upon a single word from Psalm 82:6 – "gods" (John 10:34-35). His whole point depends upon verbal inspiration.

Jesus' allusion to the "jot and tittle" constituted a tacit declaration of belief in verbal inspiration (Matt. 5:18). Not only the thought of Scripture, but also the words themselves and the letters that formed those words, were viewed as inspired. The same may be said of Jesus' quotation of Genesis 2:24 in His discourse on divorce. Notice the wording:

Have you not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said... (Matt. 19:4-5).

The verse to which Jesus alludes occurs immediately after a statement made by Adam. No indication is given in the text that the words are a direct quote of God. In fact, the words seem to be more authorial or narratorial comment by Moses, the author of the Pentateuch. Yet Jesus attributes the words to God. In other words, God is the author. This passage is not a *record* of what God said; it *is* what God said.

2. On the basis of this divine origin, Jesus also clearly demonstrated His attitude that Scripture is

authoritative and that men are obligated to follow its precepts. When He described Abraham's chat with the rich man in Hades, He quoted Abraham's remark, "*They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them*" (Luke 16:29). In so doing, He manifested His high regard for the authority of the Old Testament as the ultimate voice and guide.

To Jesus, Scripture was the ground of belief. He declared, "*O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken*" (Luke 24:25). He told the Jews,

You search the scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life...had you believed Moses, you would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if you believe not his writings, how shall you believe my words? (John 5:39, 46-47).

Jesus asserted that the Old Testament bore authoritative divine witness to Himself and, in so doing, bore witness to the authority of the Old Testament itself.

Many instances demonstrate Jesus' recognition of the authority of Scripture. In Matthew 12:39-40, Jonah's experience (Jonah 1:17) foreshadowed Jesus' own burial: "*For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation*" (Luke 11:30). In Matthew 4:17ff, Jesus opposed Jewish traditions and scribal commentary for making void the word of God. In Mark 12:10, to confirm the point of His parable, Jesus introduced an authoritative Scripture with the rhetorical query, "*Have you not read this scripture?*" In Luke 4:21, Jesus declared Isaiah 61:1-

2 to be applicable to those who were in His presence on that occasion. In Luke 24:27,44, why expound the Old Testament Scriptures or declare the necessity of their fulfillment unless they are authoritative for His listeners? In John 15:25, words from a Psalm are described as "*law*."

Perhaps the most striking proof that Jesus viewed Scripture as authoritative is the occasion when He ascribed legal authority to the entirety of Scripture—a view also held by the people (John 12:34). By maintaining that "*the scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:34-35), Jesus was asserting that its authority cannot be annulled, denied, or withstood. Scripture's authority is final and irrevocable. It governs all of life and will be fulfilled come what may. Clearly, Jesus' uniform attitude toward Scripture was one of complete trust and confidence in its authority.

3. Jesus also viewed Scripture as propositional, absolute, and objective. Phrases like "*it is written*," "*God said*," "*through the prophets*," and "*scripture says*" show that Jesus and His apostles esteemed the Old Testament as divine and regarded its precepts as absolute truth. Its objective and absolute quality is seen in His frequent allusion to the Jewish writings as a unit—a well-defined sacred totality (Matt. 5:17-18; Luke 24:44; cf., Matt. 24:35). The apostles and gospel writers agreed with Jesus' view that Scripture must be fulfilled (cf., Matt. 26:26; Luke 3:4; 22:37; John 12:38).

Even as a boy of twelve, Jesus' handling of Scripture as an objective body of truth was evident as

He dazzled the doctors of the law with *"his understanding and answers"* (Luke 2:47). This characteristic continued throughout His earthly habitation. He contradicted His antagonists (e.g., the chief priests, scribes, and Sadducees) by declaring the source of religious error to be their ignorance of the Scriptures (Matt. 21:16,22:29). He as much as said, *"If you knew scripture, you wouldn't be in error"* (cf., Mark 12:24). He prodded the Pharisees to consult Hosea 6:6—*"go and learn what this means"* (Matt. 9:13). On the other hand, Jesus knew Scripture (He ought to, He wrote it!), and He used Scripture as the basis of objective perception.

The propositional nature of Scripture is particularly apparent in Christ's frequent use of isolated Old Testament statements (i.e., propositions) to prove various contentions. He used Psalm 110:1 to prove His lordship (Mark 12:36). He proved His Messianic identity and impending resurrection by alluding to an apparent conflation of Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13 (Mark 14:62). He proved His death and resurrection were imminent by referring to Psalm 118:22 (Mark 12:10-22; cf., Acts 4:11).

Our older preachers opposed denominational doctrine and other forms of error by teaching, defending, and debating biblical truth. They fully understood that truth is objective—not subjective. In a day when many of our brotherhood *"scholars"* are ridiculing such belief and behavior, our *"scholars"* would do well to realize that our older preachers have only been emulating Jesus! No one is a true scholar unless he thinks and acts like our Lord!

## JESUS' USE OF SCRIPTURE

Not only does the New Testament enlighten us as to Christ's attitude toward Scripture, it also gives us many striking samples of Jesus' pragmatic use of Scripture in day-to-day life. At least three observations emerge from an examination of Jesus' actual handling of Scripture.

1. He relied very heavily upon Scripture. He quoted from the Old Testament frequently. He constantly reiterated to His disciples the profound permeation of life by the written words of God (e.g., Luke 24:27). He consistently affirmed the certainty of Scripture's fulfillment in the world (e.g., Luke 24:44-46). He possessed a sense of the unity of history and a grasp of its wide sweep (e.g., Luke 11:50-51).

Preachers among churches of Christ were once distinguished by their "*book, chapter, and verse*" approach to preaching. This very quality was typical of Jesus' own approach to life. Yet our preachers and members today are far more impressed by the words of Swindoll, Dobson, Stott, Skinner, Kierkegaard, and Barth than with the words of John, Jesus, Peter, Paul, and Moses. We have abandoned the primary sources in exchange for secondary, inferior, and in many cases, erroneous sources. We are now the most academically educated generation the church has ever known—yet we are the most ignorant when it comes to plain Bible knowledge. It's high time we returned to a "*Bible totin', Scripture quotin'*" lifestyle. It's high time we got back to emulating Jesus' own extensive reliance upon Scripture.



2. In addition to a heavy reliance upon Scriptural quotation, Jesus repeatedly demonstrated incredible proclivity for rationality in His sharp, potent, penetrating use of logic and sound argumentation. His first recorded responsible activity consisted of logical dialogue between Himself and the Jewish theologians at the age of twelve! His logical prowess was evident not only to the doctors of the law, but to his parents as well (Luke 2:45-51). On the occasion of His baptism, He reasoned with John in order to convince John to go ahead and immerse Him (Matt. 3:13-15). He advanced a logical reason to justify the action.

Immediately after this incident, Jesus faced Satan in the desert (Matt. 4:1-11). Satan posed three arguments, urging Christ to act on the basis of the erroneous reasoning which Satan set forth. The sequence of the disputation between the two demonstrates Christ's superior (i.e., accurate) use of logic to defeat His opponent. To summarize this interchange between Christ and Satan, Jesus used direct statement, account of action, and implication. His allusion to the behavior of the Israelites, His use of direct statements from Deuteronomy, and His implied applications to the situation He was facing—all demonstrate a hermeneutic analogous to the one generally operative among churches of Christ.

This incident also provides us with a marvelous demonstration of Christ's mastery of debate and logical disputation. The example is not an isolated instance. Jesus employed logic and reason throughout His earthly sojourn. He consistently responded to His

contemporaries with piercing, devastating logic. He was continually besieged with questions and verbal tests to which He consistently displayed rational, reasoned response (Luke 11:53-54). Consider these few examples:

The exchange with the Pharisees over eating grain (Matt. 12:1-9);

The dialogue with chief priests and elders over authority (Matt. 21:23-27)

The interaction with the Pharisees over taxes (Matt. 22:15-22);

The response to the Sadducees concerning marriage and the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33);

The argument posed to the Pharisees over the identity of the Messiah (Matt. 22:41-46);

The demonstrations of healing on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6; Luke 13:14-16; 14:1-6);

The response to the lawyers concerning the source of His miraculous power (Luke 11:14ff);

The answer concerning fasting (Luke 5:33-39);

The handling of Simon's disgruntled view of the sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50);

The exchange with the Pharisees concerning His triumphal entry (Luke 19:39-40);

The comments upon the occasion of His arrest (Luke 22:47-53).

Jesus was so sensible and rational in His discourse that when hard-hearted Jews declared Him to be mad or demon-possessed, others countered: *"These are not the words of one who has a demon"* (John 10:21). Indeed, Jesus consistently provided evidence,

even empirical evidence, to substantiate His claims (John 10:24-26, 36-38). How could anyone possibly question the fact of Jesus' consistent use of logic and correct reasoning? He was and is the master logician who created the human mind to function rationally as well! His inspired followers were no different.

3. Closely related to Jesus' emphasis upon logic was His virtually constant use of implication. Modern scholars are surely uncomfortable with Jesus' use of what many have called "*necessary inference*." Indeed, within churches of Christ, cries which call for an abandonment of implication in interpreting the Scriptures are growing louder. Not only is such thinking self-contradictory, it is patently foolish in light of Jesus' own accurate use of implication!

Over and over Jesus used implication. In Matthew 4:1-11, every case of Jesus' use of Old Testament Scripture to counter Satan's arguments requires proper reasoning and drawing of correct conclusions implied by the explicit statements of Jesus. In Matthew 12:1-9, Jesus implied that if the Pharisees accepted David, who clearly violated Old Testament law, they should have no problem accepting the disciples, who did not violate Old Testament law. In Matthew 21:23-27, Jesus implied that if the chief priests and elders believed John's baptism to be from Heaven, they should have submitted to John's teaching. He further implied that if they believed John's baptism to be from men, they ought to have been willing to face the peoples' displeasure. The chief priests and elders had enough sense to infer precisely what Jesus

implied and so refused to answer.

In Matthew 22:23-32, Jesus implied that if God declared Himself to be presently the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, then they were still in existence. He further implied that if they were still in existence after their physical deaths, then resurrection of the dead is a reality. Further, in context, Exodus 3:6, 13-16 are intended to identify the One who sent Moses to Egypt. However, in making this point, God implied that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were still in existence. Jesus, in fact, is basing His point on a minor side point of the Exodus passage, but a point which is nevertheless clearly and divinely implied!

In Matthew 22:41-45, in response to Jesus' question, the Pharisees identify the Christ as David's son, no doubt alluding to 2 Samuel 7:11-17. Jesus cited Psalm 110:1 in order to encourage the Pharisees to fit two distinct concepts together by reasoning correctly about them and inferring what is clearly implied by them. Notice also that Psalm 110:1 in its original context referred to the supremacy and conquest of the Messiah over the world. But Jesus focused upon an implication of the passage—that the Messiah would be both physically descended from David and yet Lord over David.

## CONCLUSION

The Bible presents itself in terms of principles by which its truth may be ascertained. We can transcend our prejudices and presuppositions sufficiently to arrive at God's truth—if we genuinely wish to. There

is simply no such thing as “*my interpretation*” and “*your interpretation.*” There is only God’s interpretation.” There is only God’s meaning—and with diligent, rational study, we can arrive at the truth on any subject that is vital to our spiritual well-being.

Rather than shrug off the conflicting views and positions on various subjects (like baptism, music in worship, miracles, how many churches may exist with God’s approval, etc.), rather than dismiss religious differences as hopeless, unresolvable, and irrelevant—we must be about the business of studying and searching God’s book, cautiously refraining from misinterpreting and misusing Scripture. If we will give diligent and careful attention to the task with an honest heart, receptive to the truth, we can be certain of our ability to come to the knowledge of God’s will. We can be prepared, as Jesus said in John 12:48, to stand before God at the judgment and be judged by His words.

It is evident that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, demonstrated several significant hermeneutical principles in His own attitude toward and use of Scripture. He approached Scripture with the abiding conviction that the Old Testament is the authoritative, absolute, propositional, plenary, verbally inspired word of God. In His handling of Scripture, He relied heavily upon extensive Scripture quotation, proper logical reasoning, and the use of implication. When it comes to the interpretation of the word, Jesus is “*my Lord and my God!*”

## ENDNOTES

1 The claim that Jesus made an argument based upon the “tense” of Old Testament language needs clarification. Actually, Hebrew has no past, present, or future tenses. Rather, action is regarded as being either completed or incompleting and so verbs occur in the Hebrew Perfect or Imperfect. No verb occurs in God’s statement in Ex. 3:6. Consequently, tense is implied rather than expressed. In this case, the Hebrew grammar would allow any tense of the verb “to be.” Of course, Jesus clarifies the ambiguity inherent in the passage by affirming what God had in mind. Matthew preserves Jesus’ use of the Greek present tense: “Ego emi.”

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## Chapter 9

# *“My Lord And My God”* **In Evangelism And Church Growth**

*Bobby Liddell*

Bobby was educated at Walker College, University of Alabama, Memphis School of Preaching and Southern Christian University ~ Local work in Alabama and Florida ~ Extensive radio and television work ~ Served as editor of the **Defender** and **The Beacon** from 1989 to 1994 ~ Presently working with the Memphis School of Preaching ~ Joan and Bobby have three children.



### INTRODUCTION

The East Hill Church of Christ, under her godly elders, with her talented and industrious preacher, Paul Sain, are to be commended for their contributions, through these lectures, to the welfare of the brotherhood and the world. Truly, it is a blessing to have pleasant association with them, and to, as others, benefit from these inquiries into God’s Will. They shine forth as lights, showing us how to evangelize that the church may grow. May His richest blessings be upon the good brethren of the East Hill congregation and may their days be long and their way be fruitful.

The theme of this series of lectures is *“My Lord and My God,”* and the emphasis of our study is *“Evangelism and Church Growth.”* These topics should be of interest to every student of the Bible and to



everyone who loves the Lord and His people. Let us hear what God has to say, and seek, with all our hearts, to put into practice what we learn.

## **THE PROPER DESIRE FOR CHURCH GROWTH**

It is right for us to want the church to grow! God wants the church to grow. Through the great prophet, Daniel, God revealed a kingdom which would grow and never be destroyed.

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Dan. 2:44).

Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth (vs. 34-35).

Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure (v. 45).

The church would be that into which "*all nations shall flow*" (Isa. 2:2), and of which,

...many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:3).

Christ often spoke of the growth of the kingdom, the church (cf. Matt. 16:18-19; Col. 1:13).

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof. Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened (Matt. 13:31-33).

To the end that the church should grow through evangelism, Jesus commanded:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:19-20).

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned (Mark 16:15-16).

**Who should want the church to grow?** Not the enemies of God! They rejoice when the church does not grow (cf. Acts 7:54-60; 8:1-3; 9:1-2; James 4:4). Not the followers of men (Matt. 15:9; I Cor. 1:10-13), nor the churches of men (Matt. 15:13), for the church, by its very existence, condemns them (cf. Heb. 11:7). Not the devil, for he is our adversary (I Peter 5:8; cf. Luke 22:31). Not just the elders, nor just the preacher, nor just the elders and preacher. Rather, every member of the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:20) should be interested in church growth. That means you and me—fathers and mothers, parents and children, grandma and grandpa, newly converted and members for many years, elders, deacons, preachers, members—everyone! Thus, we must be busy equipping ourselves for evangelism and seeking opportunities that we might help the church to grow.

**What is church growth?** All of us should desire for the church to grow in strength, unity, spirituality, knowledge, love, zeal, selflessness, and in number. However, some things mistakenly labeled “*church growth*” are not. Growth of the Lord’s church should, in most cases, result in numerical increase (Acts 6:7), but numerical increase alone is not necessarily an appropriate indicator of church growth. For example, in conversation with a false teacher, who worked with a liberal congregation, he remarked that there were seven hundred members where he attended and that was proof that God was pleased with them and was blessing them. I replied there was a man-made church in the same town which boasted five thousand

members! Thus, if his reasoning were correct, God must REALLY be pleased with them. No, numbers alone do not necessarily indicate church growth which is pleasing to God, but church growth should result in a numerical increase. However, sometimes the church grows spiritually stronger in spite of decreased numbers. The departure of the hateful, radical, rebellious, and impenitent has been the greatest step forward for some churches and has made possible a situation conducive to real growth.

**Why should we want the church to grow?** The church is the body of Christ (Col. 1:18), and belongs to Him (Matt. 16:18; Rom. 16:16). The church is of such great importance that Christ shed His blood to purchase it (Acts 20:28). Thus, when the church grows, Christ is exalted. In the same manner, church growth brings glory to God (Eph. 3:21), and we want God to be glorified (Matt. 5:13-16). Church growth also indicates the salvation of men's souls (Acts 2:47), and we want men to be saved. As well, church growth shows our desire to save our own souls and not to be idle when we should be working (Matt. 20:6). Surely, we all should want the church to grow for the glory of God and the salvation of men's souls.

**How should we want the church to grow?** If our desire is for the church to grow to be like the denominations (I Sam. 8:5), to please men (Gal. 1:10), to provide social, recreational, or entertainment services, or to bring glory to ourselves (cf. Dan. 4:30), we are headed in the wrong direction. There is the danger, if we are not seeking church growth, that the

local congregation will gradually turn into a museum of gray-haired saints before it becomes a mausoleum housing the dead bones of once held dreams. Therefore, we must vigilantly hold to the straight course of wanting the church to be the Lord's church, distinctively different from all denominations (for, there is no salvation in a denomination and there is no salvation by denominationalism), and to grow according to the Lord's will. This is the only kind of growth the saints should desire.

**When do we want the church to grow?** Someday will never come. One day will be too late. Though we plan for the future, and we should, we have no guarantee of another day, nor, individually, of another heart beat. Jesus came with a work to do.

Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work (John 4:34).

Again, He said,

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me (John 6:38).

Jesus expressed His approach to the work before Him in view of its urgency:

I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work (John 9:4).

Truly, we must get busy working before the night comes—for then it will be eternally too late. Though some wish it were not the case, church growth requires WORK. It does not happen accidentally.

## THE TREMENDOUS URGENCY OF EVANGELISM

No doubt, every church member, would, upon reflection, admit the urgency of evangelism. Sadly, far too many fail to exhibit such an understanding through word and deed. Therefore, our task is to instruct and to encourage all to make evangelism a priority of our brief sojourn through life (cf. I Cor. 9:16; James 4:14). However, for the sake of clarity, we must first consider what is the meaning of evangelism.

Evangelism comes from the Greek word *euangelizo* which means to herald the good news. To expand upon this idea, evangelism is the preaching of the Gospel; that is, the good news, of Jesus Christ. The word evangelism is not found in the Bible, but three times evangelist or evangelists appears. These were men who preached the Gospel—heralded forth the good news (cf. II Tim. 4:1-5). Following are the passages of their occurrence.

And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him (Acts 21:8).

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:11).

But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry (II Tim. 4:5).

From these three instances, let us consider Philip (Acts 21:8), who was an evangelist who understood

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the urgency of evangelism. When the church in Jerusalem was scattered by persecution, the members went *“every where preaching the word”* (Acts 8:4). *“Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them”* (v. 5). The result of his efforts was described by the inspired penman, Luke, this way: *“And there was great joy in that city”* (v. 8). Though a sorcerer named Simon had bewitched the people for a long time, *“when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women”* (v. 12). The effects of Philip’s evangelism reached even Simon. *“Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done”* (v. 13).

Though Philip was involved in this great work in Samaria, the angel of the Lord directed him to *“Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert”* (v. 26). Without hesitation or argument to the contrary, he *“arose and went”* and found the eunuch from Ethiopia who had gone to Jerusalem to worship and, returning, was sitting in his chariot reading from Isaiah 53 (vs. 27-28). Given further instruction, this time by the Spirit, to *“Go near, and join thyself to this chariot,”* Philip immediately responded and *“ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?”* (vs. 29-30).

Upon the eunuch’s response (vs. 31-34), Philip *“opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus”* (v. 35). The result was the

eunuch believed in Jesus as the Christ the Son of God, and was baptized (vs. 36-38). *"He went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea"* (vs. 39-40). Here was one man who heard the call, ran to preach the Gospel to another, and caused Heaven to rejoice (Luke 15:10). Thank God, Philip understood the urgency of evangelism. How important it is for us to understand!

## METHODS OF EVANGELISM

Jesus commanded, *"Go...and preach the Gospel."* He did not specify how to go or how to preach. Clearly, we may use whatever means of transportation that is best suited in fulfilling the command to go. Likewise, we can employ various means of evangelizing as long as we faithfully preach the Gospel.

**The pulpit.** Gospel preachers preach the Word (II Tim. 4:2), with love for God, His Word, and the lost (Eph. 4:15). Let us never forget, preachers, that we are heralding forth the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ (I Cor. 15:1-4), to men with souls that will live eternally. Of course, we expect the pulpit to be evangelistic; however, it is not always the case that conversion begins with the work of the preacher in the pulpit. More often than not, the initial influence comes from the work of a friend, neighbor, or family member whose example and invitation bring the preacher and the prospect together. Still, the pulpit must sound forth the hope of the Gospel (Col. 1:23),



in clear and certain words (cf. I Cor. 14:7-8). In addition, the pulpit should be a place from which encouragement and instruction concerning the congregation's efforts in evangelism should sound forth. Exhortation to the work, praise for a job well done, and warning against neglect of the work of the church should be given regularly.

**The Bible school.** How can we evangelize through the Bible School? First, by knowing the ones who are attending. Who, in the class, is mature enough to obey the Gospel? Who has become a Christian—and who has not? Who is faithful and who is not? Our teaching should respond accordingly. Second, by encouraging visitors to come. We must be consistent in encouraging class members to invite their peers, and be ever watchful for opportunities. We can have special days for encouraging building up attendance. Likewise we should properly appreciate visitors, recognize them, welcome them warmly, and follow-up on their visits. However, none of this is of real benefit unless our Bible classes have something of value to offer.

**How can we use the Bible School to save the lost?** By securing opportunities to teach the Gospel to the lost, and by faithfully teaching the Truth in a way that shows concern, that facilitates understanding, that indicates commitment, and that shows proper preparation. By follow-up contacts such as sending a card (personalize it), making a phone call, visiting, and by contacting parents of those of younger ages, thanking them for allowing their children to attend,

and encouraging them to attend also.

**How can we use the Bible School to sow the seed, the Word of God (Luke 8:5-11)?** We know that seed must be sown—not stored, and that it brings forth after its kind (Gen. 1:11). Prior to sowing, the ground must be cultivated and, after sowing, the seed must be watered (I Cor. 3:6). Bible class is a great place to sow the seed (God’s Word). Pupils have come to learn; thus, the doors to their hearts are open. The teacher has, with them, a place of authority, so the opportunity for influence is there. The teacher has a place of trust, so class members will listen. The setting is positive and wholesome because the world has been temporarily excluded. We must always respect and use this wonderful opportunity to teach souls the saving message.

**How can we use the Bible School to show how one should live?** A regular Bible class affords a more intimate discussion of Truth. Questions are offered and answers are given. Problems arise and insights into their solutions come from class members. The teacher may well refer to personal experiences which illustrate or are otherwise pertinent to the discussion. The teacher has an opportunity to show Christianity in action by showing how a Christian answers doubt, resolves conflicts, and shows compassion and care. The teacher can show the results of a lifetime of study, instruct how to pray, and how to have humility and strength. Let us never minimize the opportunities, for teaching in a practical way, which the Bible class offers.

**How can we use the Bible School to send forth sowers?** We can multiply our efforts through others. We can instill in our students the principles of evangelism. By precept and example, we can encourage them to seek the lost. We can show them how to bring the lost to Christ through instruction and encouragement. We can begin to help them even when they are at a very early age and continue throughout every phase of life. Let us constantly be aware of the great opportunity of using the Bible School to evangelize.

**Audio and video tapes and CD's.** Just recently, a former student called and informed me that I had been preaching in several homes in Indiana. I replied that I was not aware of it. He then explained that he had a tape of a sermon, on the Lord's church, which I had delivered in Mississippi some years earlier, and that he had been playing it in homes in an effort to evangelize. As a result, twenty precious souls had come to Christ for salvation, being immersed into His death (Rom. 6:3-4), where they contacted His cleansing blood (Rev. 1:5). While he was graciously giving me the credit, I hastened to point out the power is in the Gospel (Rom. 1:16), and that I was just a messenger delivering God's powerful message. In addition, the conversions came as a result of his efforts to reach the lost. There are thousands of good tapes available for us to use in evangelizing, but tapes sitting on a shelf have never converted anyone.

**Bible correspondence courses** have brought many to Christ. The use of filmstrips and videos has

been very productive. **Tracts** are often instrumental in answering the questions which one outside of Christ may have. In my conversion, tracts played a great part as I sought my way out of the denominational error of Methodism and into the light of the Truth. **Radio and television** programs can herald the good news to thousands, even millions, across the city or across the globe. **The printed page** has been employed to great success in evangelism. **Training in conducting in-home Bible studies** has enabled great numbers of brethren to teach their neighbors with skill and confidence. **Programs of the church** (visitation groups, zones, brother's keeper) have been used to help keep the need for evangelism before church members. Now, **the Internet** has opened new doors to teach people around the world. Let us not forget the impact of **Gospel meetings and lectureships**. Be aware that the success of such endeavors is not nearly as dependent upon the skills of the pulpit speaker as it is upon the work of every member in inviting and persuading members of the community to come.

Remember this: when it comes to methods, we should use every right and good way to preach the Gospel and to help the church to grow (cf. Matt. 10:16).

## **EVANGELISM FROM THE TOP DOWN**

If someone were to ask the direction we should go in evangelism, it is "*from the top down.*" In the local congregation, evangelism begins with the eldership (Heb. 13:17). I have never seen an evangelistic church

without evangelistic elders (and I cannot see how such could be). It is just this simple: if elders are not interested in souls, the church will not be either and the church will not grow. However, there cannot be leadership without followship. The pulpit, under the oversight of the elders (Acts 20:28), must be a place of enthusiastic evangelism. Shame on preachers who have forgotten the power of the Gospel and who have lost their love for the lost (and the saved). The pew, following the instruction and the example of godly elders, and the preaching of the powerful Word, should "*rise up and build*" (Neh. 2:18), and the church will grow. How could such a church not grow?

### **HINDRANCES TO EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH**

Briefly, let us consider some hindrances.

1. Expecting someone else to do it for us is perhaps the greatest. We do not hire the preacher to do all the evangelism of the church. He cannot do our work for us (II Cor. 5:10), anymore than he can worship for us.

2. Living "*conformed to this world*" (Rom. 12:1). Worldliness robs us of the time, energy, resources, ability, and desire necessary for evangelism.

3. Lukewarmness is the curse of satisfaction and apathetic indifference (Rev. 3:15-16).

4. Ignorance of the Bible, whether willingly unaware or ignorantly untaught. Why will brethren spend money on worthless magazines and books and waste time reading them, but will not read the Bible,

and will not buy good books that will help them understand the Bible and encourage them, or subscribe to brotherhood magazines? Why do so many refuse to go to meetings, lectures, workshops, or carefully LISTEN to Gospel preaching? The results is ignorance.

5. Using gimmicks to try to circumvent God's plan can be a devastating hindrance.

6. Desiring to be entertained or to play instead of to be equipped and to work.

7. Laziness (Rom. 12:11; cf. Amos 6:1).

8. Feeble, ill-planned efforts (*"I knew it wouldn't work"*).

9. Discouraging words (*"We tried that before—and it didn't work"*).

10. Inner strife (read Phil. 4:1-3).

11. Losing sight of the work of the church or the value of souls.

12. Becoming all negative or all positive.

13. Excuses: *"I do not have enough time," "I do not know how," "I am afraid I will make a mistake," "No one will listen anyway,"* et al.

14. Zeal without knowledge (Rom. 10:2).

15. Knowledge without zeal (James 4:17).

16. Ugly attitudes (Prov. 18:24).

17. Ungodly living (cf. I Peter 3:1). Immorality and dishonesty can hinder the growth of the church for years.

18. Procrastination.

19. Wrong priorities (Matt. 6:33).

20. Sitting in the church building thinking, *"Here we are. Come if you want to."*

21. Liberalism—might bring people to “*church*,” but not to Christ.

22. Anti-ism—might convert people to crankiness, but not to Christ.

23. Radicalism—might convert people to nuttiness, but not to Christ.

24. The myth of “*retirement*” from the service of the Lord (cf. II Tim. 4:6-8).

25. Unfaithfulness.

## HELPS TO EVANGELISM AND CHURCH GROWTH

1. Godly elders.

2. Strong pulpit.

3. Working deacons.

4. Converted members.

5. Orderly, well led worship.

6. Well organized Bible classes with competent caring teachers.

7. Work programs offering opportunities for all.

8. Interest in all age groups.

9. Adequate facilities.

10. Thoughtful expenditure of funds in accordance with God’s will.

11. Regular varied efforts to reach the community (Gospel meetings, campaigns, workshops, lectures, vacation Bible school, et al.).

12. Faithfulness to God and to His Word in public and private, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

13. Knowledge and zeal.

14. An understanding of the urgency of evangelism.

15. A desire to glorify God in the church (Eph. 3:21).

## CONCLUSION

Evangelism and church growth. God commands the former and supplies the latter (Mark 16:15-16; I Cor. 3:6). Required of us are compassion and commitment in supplying the common need of all men to hear about Jesus and His way (Rom. 10:13-17; Jude 3).

A principle to keep in mind comes from the lips of four lepers, who, during the Syrian siege of Samaria, desperately concluded:

If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die (II Kings 7:4).

Thus, they left Samaria and found the Syrian camp deserted but the spoil left behind. Rejoicing over the sparing of their lives and their good fortune, they ate and drank and hid the treasure for themselves, but then they remembered the city of Samaria was in a famine and the people were at the point of death.

Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household (II Kings 7:9).



Brethren this is a day of good tidings. How can we hold our peace when our fellow man is dying and needs to hear the good news of Christ? Let us tell others the good news of the sparing of our lives (spiritually) and the treasure we have found and the church will grow.

## Chapter 10

# *“My Lord And My God”* **In True Happiness**

*Perry B. Cotham*

Perry has powerfully preached the gospel for over sixty-two years, on every inhabited continent, in over sixty nations. He has been involved in full-time evangelistic work since 1972. He continues his work in gospel meetings and lectureships. He has excellent books and material he has written. Perry and Teresa are loved and highly respected by those who know them. They live in Grand Prairie, Texas.



**T**he apostle Paul wrote that the fruits of the Spirit—the fruit that the Holy Spirit produces in the life of the obedient child of God—includes joy and peace.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, **joy, peace**, longsuffering (patience, NASB), gentleness (kindness, ASV, NASB), goodness, faith (faithfulness, ASV, NASB), meekness (gentleness, NASB), temperance (self-control, ASV): against such there is no law (Gal. 5:22-23).

Paul also stated in Romans 5:2 that Christians *“rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”* And Peter said of them that although they did not see Jesus, *“yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory”* (I Peter 1:8). The Ethiopian nobleman after his baptism into Christ *“went on his way rejoicing”* (Acts 8:39).

## THE SOURCE OF HAPPINESS

Happiness is in us, not in things. God wants His children to be happy, but the fountain of contentment must spring up in the mind of each Christian. There is *“joy and peace in believing”* (Rom. 15:13) and in obeying the will of the Lord. He who seeks happiness by changing things,, will waste his life in fruitless efforts and multiply the griefs which he proposes to remove.

The Word of God offers the true way to obtain happiness. In order to be happy the right dispositions must be formed in our hearts. Many seek happiness but they do not know how to obtain it. Paul was once a prisoner in chains in Rome (Acts 28:30-31), yet he rejoiced, and told his beloved friends at Philippi to *“rejoice in the Lord”* (Phil. 1:18; 2:17-18; 3:1; 4:4).

Paul’s rejoicing is all the more remarkable if we remember his circumstances at the time he wrote this epistle. He was not only a prisoner confined in a small house chained to soldiers, he realized that he might be beheaded any day by Nero and die as a martyr. And while facing probable execution he was dependent on the charity of his Christian friends (Phil. 2:30). The poet has well stated:

Stone walls do not a prison make,  
Nor iron bars a cage;  
Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for an heritage:  
If I have freedom in my love,  
And in my soul am free,  
Angels alone, that soar above,  
Enjoy such liberty.

~ Richard Lovelace

Hence, Paul's bonds did not mar his happiness. He would write:

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better (Phil. 1:21-23).

Even years earlier when he was in the jail at Philippi with his feet fast in the stock and his back smarting from the scourge, "*Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God*" (Acts 16:25).

Paul's reiteration of the command to "*rejoice*" is impressive. "*Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, Rejoice*" (Phil. 4:4, ASV). Then he seems to hear some one of his readers say: "*Why! Paul, you told us that once before!*" "Yes," he says, "*and you shall hear it again; so important is my commandment that it should be repeated. So I again say, 'rejoice' for the third time*" (Phil. 3:1; 4:4). How many times should Paul say that joy is an important element in Christian duty, and tell them to rejoice? Three times?

### A LIFE IN CHRIST

By being in Christ and abiding in Him in obedience to His Word is the ground of rejoicing. "*Rejoice in the Lord.*" This is the secret of all blessedness. They who thus dwell in Christ have the purest joy, although the world may not call it joy. Hence, children of God are happy people but his happiness is found only "*in Christ,*" and by obeying Him. The song writer expressed this truth in a well-known hymn:

Only in thee, O Savior mine.  
Dwelleth my soul in peace divine,  
Peace that the world, tho' all combine,  
Never can take from me.  
Pleasures of earth, so seemingly sweet,  
Fail at the last my longings to meet;  
Only in Thee my bliss is complete,  
Only dear Lord, in Thee.  
~ T. O. Chisholm

Thus, living a life of trustful obedience to the blessed will of the Lord brings joy and peace amid outward sorrows and conflicts and trials to the child of God. This kind of life brings rest to the soul. Submission to the Lord's will is peace. Communion with God is peace. But a life without Christ is a life without peace. Jesus said to His disciples prior to His ascension:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

Again,

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world (John 16:33; cf. 14:1-3).

So, a life without Christ is a life void of peace. One will never have real peace until he becomes a Christian and lives the Christian life. This is the only way to get peace; there is no other way. If happiness in this world consisted only in the possession of things, there would be no end to the struggles to obtain them.

People talk of wealth, fame, and power as undeniable sources of enjoyment. But these do not guarantee happiness. Thousands possess these earthly benefits and are not happy. There is little real happiness on earth because people seek it where it is not, and neglect to seek it where it alone dwells.

Many go forth to seek happiness for themselves without obeying the Scriptures, and disappointment attends every step of their pursuit. They will not have it until they seek it where it can be found. He that has most still wants something. Solomon tried the things of life for happiness and found them all empty "*vanities*;" then he gave the correct answer in conclusion. Here it is:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:  
Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this  
is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring  
every work into judgment, with every secret  
thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil  
(Eccl. 12:13-14).

Very few people, in comparison, radiate a happy, contented face. Many are worrying about something, mostly about their wealth or their health. But a man is rich or poor according to what he **is**, and not according to what he **has**. Christ said that a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth (Luke 12:15).

A contented mind is one of the greatest blessings a person can enjoy in this world. If we are cheerful and contented all nature smiles with us. We carry sunshine with us wherever we go. So, let us try to

look on the bright side of life. Let us be cheerful, for it is the only happy life. Let us not wear a gloomy and sad countenance. It has been said that sugar will draw more flies than vinegar. You say you have troubles. So have others. None are free from them. But try to greet your friends each new day with a hearty "good morning;" and say it cheerfully and with a smile. It will do you good, and it will do your friends good if you will do this. God bless that bright sunny face!

The prophet declared:

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee (Isa. 26:3).

Let us, therefore, as Christians confidently commit everything into the hands of our heavenly Father, knowing that He will take care of us and never leave us or forsake us, "for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5).

### **PAUL'S ADMONITION**

To further our study let us note Paul's words of admonition to the Philippian church:

Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:6-7).

This is one of finest portions of Scripture to be found on the inward joy and peace of being a

faithful child of God, when we remember that Paul knew not what his outcome might be. (1) *“Be careful for nothing”* means do not be *“anxious”* (ASV, NASB, NKJV), or full of worry about the things of this present life. The expression does not mean that we are not to exercise any concern to provide for ourselves and those of our families, for this would contradict other statements of the Bible (cf. I Thess. 4:11-12; II Thess. 3:10-12; I Tim. 5:8; Prov. 6:6-8). The words mean that our minds are to be free from that incessant worry and anxiety that would rob us of an inward peace in serving the Lord and doing out very best.

Then (2) *“in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known unto God.”* We can always find something for which to be thankful, no matter what may be the burden of our wants. We can always rejoice, regardless of our trials and afflictions, in the hope of heaven before us. And we can always pray. So, let us *“trust and obey”* as we often sing.

Then what? (3) *“And the peace of God (that is, the peace that God gives with such an attitude and disposition) shall keep (guard, ASV) your hearts and minds through (in, ASV) Christ Jesus.”* If we would follow Paul’s instructions as he had learned to do, we would have that inward peace which God gives to Christians. *“Shall keep”* is a military term.

Note further what Paul said:

for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am,  
therewith to be content. I know both how to be  
abased, and I know how to abound: every where



and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:11-13).

We learn from Paul then that the faithful child of God, committing his way to God, knowing that the Lord will always do that which is right, has a peace within his soul that is nowhere else to be found or known. How wonderful! That "*peace of God*" in the heart (the whole inner man) is unbroken amidst all conflicts. But notice how one gets this peace from God. It is a promise on conditions (as stated in verses 6 and 7), and the conditions must be followed. To fret over our unpleasant circumstances will not reprove them; but it will make us worse ourselves. The best way to get the most out of life is to carry Christ in our hearts. In the measure we do so, we shall have happiness and peace.

### **"DO NOT WORK"**

Jesus gave this same teaching in His Sermon on the Mount:

Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought (Be not anxious, ASV; do not worry, NKJV) for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?...Which of you by taking thought (by being anxious, ASV; by worrying, NKJV) can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought (worry, NKJV) for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you,

That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought (do not worry, NKJV), saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought (do not worry, NKJV) for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought (worry, NKJV) for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof (is its own trouble, NKJV; Each day has enough trouble of its own, NASB) (Matt. 6:25-34).

Christ's words, "*take no thought*," therefore, mean do not worry, do not be filled with anxiety. This is a sin of many otherwise good Christians. The word "*careful*" does not mean what it usually does to many people. It means "*full of care*," or being "*anxious*." It is having a persistent anxiety that hinders one from doing his best in life. Christ did not mean that one should take no thought as to plans for common necessities or duties, but that one should not fill his life with worry and anxiety. To many this teaching seems to be an impossible command to obey. But what Paul and Christ taught is the only course that makes the apparent impossibility possible. Christians can stop much of their worrying.

## TO WORRY OR NOT TO WORRY

It has often been said that if a matter is not serious enough to pray about, then it is not serious enough to worry about. Furthermore, if it is serious enough to pray about, and we have prayed about it, then there is no need to worry about it.

## THE ALTERNATIVES

Here, then, are the alternatives. If we do not like to take the one we are sure to take the other. If we do not pray about everything, we will be worried about most things. We make up our minds which of the two we are going to take. If a thing is great enough to cause us to worry and be filled with anxiety, it is great enough for us to talk to God about. If God and I are on good terms I can talk to Him about it.

About the only notion that some have of prayer is to ask God to give them something they want. But thanksgiving is also in place. So Paul tells us to put your worries and cares into definite speech to God, with thanksgiving, and make our requests known to God. And Peter said, "*...casting all your anxiety upon him, because he careth for you*" (I Peter 5:7, ASV).

Thus friendship with God, in obedience to His word, is indispensable to all true peace of heart. Otherwise, there will be no real peace within. The peace of God is peace within ourselves. God is the only possession that brings quiet. The reason the world is so full of excitement is because it is so empty of God. The world offers excitement, but the Lord offers repose. And the peace of God transcends all understanding.

## JOY IN HOPE OF HEAVEN

Paul also mentioned in the Philippian letter his joy in the anticipation of being with his dear Christian friends in heaven, and of the happiness they would all share together. He said, *"Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and my crown..."* (Phil. 4:1; cf. 2:16). In an earlier epistle to the Thessalonians, he wrote:

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? For ye are our glory and joy (I Thess. 2:19-20).

These Christians were not only his joy then, but were to be also in the far future in heaven. That metaphor carries on the thought to the great Judgment Day, and at the last tribunal, when each one will give an account of the deeds done in his body, whether good or bad (II Cor. 5:10). At that time there will be laid upon Paul's head a crown of victory for his work done on earth. Paul indicates by these words that his converts he had made in this life (who would be in heaven at that time), will be a source of his rejoicing (cf. Dan. 12:3). We know that all the redeemed will be happy together in that eternal home of the soul.

MacKnight, commenting on Paul's statement in Philippians 4:1, said:

His meaning is, that their conversion and perseverance would procure him much honor and a great reward at the judgment.<sup>1</sup>

Albert Barnes also makes these comments on I Thessalonians 2:20:

It would fulfill his soul with the highest happiness, that he had been the means of saving them from ruin....Paul expected evidently to **recognize** the Thessalonian Christian at the day of judgment, for he said that they would be then his "joy and crown of rejoicing," (v. 19). But this could not be, unless he should be able to know those who have been converted by his instrumentality. If he expected then to recognize them, and to rejoice with them, then we also may hope to know our pious friends in that happy world. Nothing in the Bible forbids this hope, and we can hardly believe that God created the strong ties which bind us to each other, to endure for the present life only.<sup>2</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In all circumstances of life, whatever they may be, the Christian can be contented and have that inward joy that the Lord alone can give. A joyful mind is a great blessing. Solomon wrote: "*...he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast*" (Prov. 15:15). The way to find joy and peace and to be free from distressing anxiety is for one to become a Christian by obeying the gospel by faith in Christ, repentance of sins, confession of one's faith in Christ, and immersion in baptism for the forgiveness of sins, and thereby being added by the Lord to His church (cf. Matt. 28:19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, 47; 8:35-39; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4; Gal. 3:26-27). Then living faithfully the Christian life, committing all his cares to God, knowing that the Lord will take care of him, the mind can be preserved in peace (cf. I Peter 3:10-11; 4:15; II Peter 1:5-11; Rev. 2:10; 14:13; 22:14).

The whole Philippian letter might well be summarized in two short statements: "I rejoice;" "Rejoice ye." May we learn this lesson well: "Rejoice in the Lord always."

### Endnotes

1 James MacKnight, **Apostolical Epistles**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1949), One Vol., rep. ed., p. 370.

2 Albert Barnes, **Notes on the New Testament**, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus and Philemon (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1949), rep. ed., pp. 29, 31.

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## Chapter 11

# *“My Lord And My God” And Precious Pillars Of Happy Homes*

*Robert R. Taylor, Jr.*



Robert graduated from Freed-Hardeman, David Lipscomb, and George Peabody Colleges ~ Faithfully preaching the gospel for almost fifty years ~ Has worked with the Ripley, TN congregation for over twenty years ~ An outstanding writer ~ More than two dozen books in print ~ Written for many journals and brotherhood papers ~ Irene and Robert have two children.

**A**rdent appreciation is expressed to Paul Sain, the elders and the entire East Hill congregation for the coveted invitation to speak on this good and great lectureship. I have spoken on each one except in 1994 when I had a conflict and could not be present for that one. Each one has been on the cutting edge of truth and this one on *“My Lord And My God”* is no exception. A series on that theme would be incomplete if no notice were given to the powerful and precious place the home occupies in Deity’s overall plan for the human family. I am happy to address that tremendous topic.

Words in our title are deserving of definition. Precious is something of value, of profit, of importance, of great moment, of sublime interest and of eloquent emphasis. Pillars are foundational,



fundamental and supportive. Pillars are designed to last as long as that which they uphold. In them we have the priority of permanence. Happy is the opposite of doom, gloom, sullen and unjustified sadness. The home is the basic unit of society. It is the haven that shuts out an unfriendly world and encloses scenes of serenity and helps of holiness. It is the approved place for sexual activity between husband and wife. It is the appointed realm for procreating the race. It is the cultivational center of children. It is the school where they can be taught to love God, others and self as inculcated by Jesus in Matthew 22:36-40. It is the place where future preachers, elders, deacons, Bible teachers and personal workers are cultured and developed. It is the place where we are treated the best and frequently criticize it the most. It was begun by God and is continued by the potency of His Word among those who stand in awe of that wonderful Word (Psm. 119:161). God has set "*the solitary in families*" and how exceedingly blessed we are as rich recipients of such placements.

Fifteen precious pillars of happy homes will be numbered and noted with a breath of beauty and brevity.

### **(1) Divine In Origin: A Precious Pillar**

Infidelic sociologists have told us repeatedly that we cannot know of marital derivation, of how it came about to be. Those of us who believe the Good Book can say, "*By faith we know!*" Genesis 2 affirms the delightful derivation of marvelous marriage. Man and

woman were made in God's image and after His likeness as per Genesis 1:26-27. Man was made first and then woman was made to fill up the emptiness in incomplete man. Man was only half of human kind; the other half, the queenly, glorious and beautiful half, needed to be made. Genesis 2:18-24 delineates this precious procedure on Deity's part. Marriage existed in God's mind before it became a human reality and an earthly experience. Man and woman did not evolve; neither did marriage evolve by experimenting couples over an extended period of time. The origination of marriage was in the divine blueprint, the heavenly pattern for humanity. How profoundly precious!

## **(2) Human Composition: A Precious Pillar**

Marriage was not designed for angels. Jesus made that crystal clear in His polemic battle with infidelic Sadducees in Matthew 22:23-33; Mark 12:18-27 and Luke 20:27-38. Angels are created beings but marriage, sex and procreation are not their lot. Marriage is not for animals. Animals are male and female and procreate offspring but the monogamy of marriage is not their assigned lot. Marriage is not for those of the same sex—two men or two women. It is not for human and an animal. Marriage is for an eligible man and an eligible woman. God did not make another man for Adam. He did not make Eve and then make another woman for her. Man and woman are wonderfully adapted for each other. God designed it that way. This is why we have in the Bible Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Amram and Jochebed,

Zacharias and Elisabeth, Joseph and Mary, Zebedee and Salome and Aquila and Priscilla. All these were heterosexual unions—not homosexual unions. Godless men and women need to desist in perverting this precious pillar for marital marvel and majesty.

### **(3) A Threesome—Not A Twosome: A Precious Pillar**

Marriage is not to be a straight line with husband at one end and wife at the other end. It is not to be just a human contract. It is not to be like piecrust—made to be broken. It is to be a triangle with God at the apex angle, the husband at one of the base angles and the wife at the other base angle. Marriage was a threesome in Genesis 2—God, Adam and Eve. Marriage was a threesome at the wedding feast in John 2—Jesus, the unnamed groom and the unnamed bride. Marriage is a threesome in Matthew 19 and Mark 10—the Lord, the husband and the wife. Succinctly, Jesus stated, *“What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”* (Matt. 19:6). Hardhearted husbands in Malachi’s era were seeking to sever what Jehovah God had joined (2:14ff). Jehovah hated the divorce habits of these sensual men who were dealing treacherously and deceitfully with the wives of their youth. Knowing men as we do, we have no doubt but what they had women, younger and more desirable, waiting in the wings to take quickly the place of unwanted mates, mates they were divorcing. This is precisely the way it works with lascivious rapidity in our day.

#### **(4) Commitment: A Precious Pillar**

*“Marriage is for those who love God and one another”* was an often repeated observation by the late and lamented Thomas B. Warren. They were/are words filled with wisdom and weight. In such there is commitment to God on the part of both and commitment to each other in the marvels of matrimony. Such is lacking in the ever popular practice of live-in arrangements or convenient fornicating frameworks. Men and women meet, mate and meander out of that relationship for a repeat performance with another naive mate which appears to be a little more exciting. Multiple partners over a lifetime feed this lascivious practice that defies God’s law and the ultimate good of society at large. They make babies out of wedlock and rear them minus godly parentage. How utterly unfair to these highly unfortunate babies and children who will grow up and persist in the same ungodly practices themselves.

#### **(5) Communication: A Precious Pillar**

Marriage counselors, after whom I have read, label this as a persistent problem in troubled homes and marred marriages. Husbands and wives clam up and hold everything inside. One of the benefits of counseling is getting both alienated parties at the table to talk. Very often I will ask the troubled couple three questions: (1) Do you both know what is right? (2) Do you both want to do what is right? (3) Do you both want to do what is right NOW? Ignorance in question one may be remedied by Biblical instruction relative to marital matters. Hesitation in number two needs

much more Biblical education. Aiming to be tardy in the execution of number three places marital difficulties into great and grave jeopardy. An extra dosage of the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31 plus what Paul and Peter wrote respectively in Ephesians 5:22-33 and I Peter 3:1-8 would work wonders in the solving of thorny problems. I have included verse 8 in I Peter 3 because this general counsel will work well in marriage where both major in the execution of the same. *"We need to talk"* should not fall on deaf ears when spoken by one troubled mate to another troubled mate in marriage.

Communicative lines are also essential in parent-child relationships. Siblings should keep the communicative lines open. Fueding children can do much to disrupt family felicity and home harmony. A look at Abraham's family, Isaac's family and Jacob's family fully attests to such.

Silence is not golden when talking needs to be done among alienated family members.

### **(6) Permanence: A Precious Pillar**

Temporary has replaced permanence in far too many marital situations. It is no longer popular to make a promise of fidelity till death. Now it is more pleasing to say, *"As long as love lasts or excitement remains."* Matthew 19:6 has **permanent** written above it, below it and on each side! Men in Malachi's day rejected permanence in marriage and so did the calloused people who quizzed the Lord in Matthew 19 and Mark 10. Paul had permanence secondarily in

mind when he wrote Romans 7:1-4. His point of priority was their being no longer married to Moses and his covenant. But he made a needed point about marital permanence also. The Pauline point is powerful and plain. There had to be a death, Christ's, before their release from the mandates of the Mosaic covenant. Likewise, there has to be a death, that of the husband, before the wife is freed from God's marital covenant to him. The lone exception while both yet lived, as expressed in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9, was not in this Pauline discussion.

Longevity in marriage is no longer on the front burner of matrimony with modern couples en masse. Such is sad, inexpressibly so!

### **(7) Joy: A Precious Pillar**

Joy is an important ingredient of the fruit of the Spirit as delineated by the princely Paul in Galatians 5:22-23. Incidentally, it is fruit—not fruits. Quite often we hear an “s” put on this word when it is discussed. Joy is an eloquent essential for a marvelous marriage. Note its precious placement in the lovely list. It is subsequent to love; it comes prior to peace. Its holy handmaidens are longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith or faithfulness, meekness and temperance or self-control. Joy is usually associated with weddings. That abounding joy should not end soon after the wedding and the honeymoon are completed. I know that tragedy can strike a newly married couple with a sudden loss of health, a crippling accident, the loss of a job, the sudden death of a parent or even the sudden

death one of the newly married mates. But joy should not be interrupted by infidelity, unkindness, a lack of sensitivity, a failure to keep promises made during courtship or at the wedding altar, the loss of spiritual interest, etc.

Solomon's wisdom for marital majesty is incorporated into the sage verses of Proverbs 5:15-20. One of those valiant verses reads, "*Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth*" (v. 18). Malicious men in Malachi's era paid no attention to such wise, weighty words though they were part and parcel of that very law to which **all** of them were amenable. Had they done so, the inspired prophet would not have written as he did in Malachi 2:14-16. There needs to be a restoring of joy in marriage where gloom and doom now predominate.

### **(8) Sexual Satisfaction: A Precious Pillar**

God made men and women into creatures of sexuality. Procreation is one aspect of such unions but not the whole of sexuality by any means. It was intended to bond and blend a husband and wife in pleasurable intimacy. Marriage is the **only** realm wherein this expression of intimate joy can rightfully occur. Men and women prostitute this God-given gift when they engage therein outside marriage whether in dating, one night stands or ongoing affairs of adultery after marriage has been entered. David paid dearly when he sought sexual satisfaction from one not his wife. In fact, she belonged to another man—one of David's own valiant soldiers fighting on a

foreign battlefield at the very moment the adulterous affair occurred in Jerusalem.

Paul deals with this aspect of marriage in I Corinthians 5:1ff. Each should be solicitous for the needs of the other. Neither should practice sexual blackmail or sexual denial within the bedroom. Rendering due benevolence toward each other will prohibit these marriage killers from entering. When they do enter, they can be fatal and rapid is the death inflicted. Matthew 7:12 would work wonders in marital bedrooms.

### (9) **Selflessness: A Precious Pillar**

There are two words, each beginning with the letter S, which depict opposite philosophies for marriage and the home. The **despicable** one is selfishness; the **delightful** one is selflessness. Satan exemplifies the former; the Saviour exemplifies the latter. They are even more distant from each other than are the North and South poles, than are the proverbial East and West. Never shall the twain mix and mingle, blend and bond. Courtship will usually reveal to the astute which philosophy each accepts. The young man who expects and demands sexual favors from the young lady is selfish to the nth degree. The young woman who seeks to seduce her dating partner into fornication with her is selfish to the nth degree. Shechem with Dinah in Genesis 34 and Judah with Tamar in Genesis 38 show selfish men in sexual exploits. Potiphar's wife toward Joseph in Genesis 39 portrays a paramour who is utterly selfish in her



sexuality. The fornicator in I Corinthians 5 with his father's wife manifests selfishness in a New Testament context.

At the wedding altar the selfish partner may think, "*Now what can he/she do to make me happy?*" The other can be selfless and yet may face a very unhappy married life with one who retains the all important I, me, my and mine philosophy. Both of them may think selfishly and this will lead to trouble and it will come with rapidity.

On a much higher peak of marital interaction each may approach marriage and enter into a lifelong relationship with the foundational philosophy, "*Now what can I do to make him/her happy now that this marriage is a reality?*"

Selfishness is disruptive and destructive; selflessness is a bright and beautiful builder of marvelous marriages, of happy homes.

The parent-child relationship will either rest on the sandy foundation of selfishness or the rock-like foundation of selflessness. Satan at work in both testaments shows selfishness in the ascendancy; Jesus Christ at work in the New Testament demonstrates selflessness at work. Matthew 20:28 and Mark 10:45 fully attest to the correctness of this observation.

### **(10) Spirituality: A Precious Pillar**

Enoch had it in the home he headed as he walked with God for three or more centuries (Gen. 5:21-24; cf. Heb. 11:5). Noah had it in the home he headed and bequeathed its holy heritage and lovely legacy to his

wife, their three sons and three daughter-in-laws (Gen. 6-8). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in later life when he ceased to be a supplanter and became a prince prevailing in power with God, were spiritual giants. Had they not been, God never would have referred to Himself as "*the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*" (Exod. 3:6, 16). Sarah, Jochebed, Ruth, Hannah, Deborah, the worthy woman in Proverbs 31 and Esther were feminine greats of spirituality in the Old Testament. The marvelous Marys, Elisabeth, Anna, Salome, Susanna, Dorcas, Phebe, Lois, Eunice, and the elect lady in II John were all spiritual feminine giants in the New Testament. Moses, Joshua, Caleb, Samuel, David, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, Ezra, Nehemiah, Mordecai, the major and minor prophets, John the Baptist, the apostles, New Testament prophets, the early evangelists, Paul's fellow-laborers and godly elders such as shepherded the flock at Ephesus in Acts 20 were all giants of spirituality in Bible times. Many of these were family men and women and what powers they wielded in marriage and the households they headed and managed!

Spirituality is not on the front burner among husbands, wives, fathers, mothers and children in our day but it needs to be there for a surety! Minus its rich inclusion in the family framework, homes will flounder, be flawed and fail with permanent impact. The Bible is the only Book showing us how to be spiritual. Carnality will not produce it; secularism will not bequeath it; worldliness will not transmit it; false religions and unscriptural worship patterns will not

confer it. Yet these are the polluted fountains from which people en masse are drinking in our day. How amazingly amazing!

### **(11) Wisdom: A Precious Pillar**

Solomon, Wisest of the Ages, wrote,

Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands...a prudent wife is from the Lord (Prov. 14:1; 19:14).

Wise husbands will work with their wise, prudent wives and build together a sound, solid, stable home for themselves and their beloved children as they come along. Would husbands know what wisdom is needed to be linked with prudent wives? Let us read and reflect, delve and drink deeply of what James says about the wisdom that comes from above in James 1:5; 3:17-18. This is the way for wives to achieve such also.

In the finale of the Sermon on the Galilean Mount the prophet from Nazareth depicted two diverse foundations upon which the wise and foolish erect houses. The former build upon a solid, immovable rock; the latter build upon the shifting sands. The former withstands all testing elements and stands; the latter collapses when testing time arrives. Here are wisdom and folly at work. In most homes today folly is on the throne and not the wisdom that comes from above.

Homes are going to be built upon the rock of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and Their Infallible Word or upon the shifting sands of Satan and his sin

strategems. Satan now holds an undisputed monopoly in marriage and home foundations. This is not open for dispute or debate to the contrary. This, precisely, is why homes are flawed and why they falter, flounder and fall **never** to be revived again. In their fall souls are lost forever to the Cause of Truth. Home failure is one of the greatest tragedies of our day. It has repercussions that defy accurate assessment.

### **(12) A Team Of Truth: A Precious Pillar**

Noah and his wife were such a team. They reared three sons to fear God, keep His commandments and choose wives worthy of them and their family. All eight of these were saved in the ark (Gen. 6-8; cf. Heb. 11:7; I Peter 3:20; II Peter 2:5).

Abraham and Sarah were such a team. "*By faith*" and "*through faith*" were used of them in Hebrews 11:8-19. Look at the tremendous job they did with Isaac who would play an important role in the developing of the famed Abrahamic promises which would culminate in the Messiah (Gen. 26:3-5). Genesis 18:19 is a great compliment to Abraham and surely Sarah is included in the training that permeates this precious passage of Sacred Scripture.

Amram and Jochebed were such a team. They were parents to Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Saving a child was far more important to this godly couple than honoring a devilish decree from an insensitive Pharaoh. They are honored in Exodus 2 and Hebrews 11.

Elkanah and Hannah were such a team. Together they went to Shiloh to worship in I Samuel 1. Together

they kept a vow to loan youthful Samuel to Jehovah from early age onward as we learn from I Samuel 1-2.

Zacharias and Elisabeth were such a team. Luke affirms,

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (Luke 1:6).

What a wonderful, worthy home was chosen in which John would be born.

Joseph and Mary were such a team. He listened to Heaven's will and she was fully submissive also. Together, along with Jesus, they went to observe the Passover at Jerusalem in Luke 2. Jehovah did not choose the unrighteous, the ungodly, the infidelic and the irreligious to head and manage the home wherein His only begotten Son would be reared. Multitudes of children that Jesus loves so deeply today are being reared in the type of homes that do Him no honor and bring no glory to the noble name of His Heavenly Father. How sad, inexpressibly so!

Two teams of falsehood, violence and immorality would not have been fit or appropriate as parents to John and Jesus respectively. Joseph had nothing to do with the conception and birth of Jesus by way of biological links but he headed the home wherein Jesus lived and grew. He may have died between the time Jesus was twelve and when He began His personal ministry at the age of thirty.

Aquila and Priscilla were such a team of truth. They are portrayed in four Biblical chapters—Acts 18; Romans 16; I Corinthians 16 and II Timothy 4. They

were a team of tentmakers, as disciples, as helpers to Paul, even to the point of risking their own lives to save Paul. In assisting Apollos and in opening their home for church assemblies. How noble and noteworthy. They added a new dimension to Christian couples at work for the Lord.

Husbands and wives need to be teams of truth and partners in piety. Such is eminently true in prayerful petitions. Peter envisioned such in I Peter 3:7 and wanted to make sure that their prayers were not short-circuited on the way to God's throne of petitioning grace (cf. Heb. 4:16).

### **(13) Obedience: A Precious Pillar**

Husbands and wives need to be obedient to the laws of God, the elders who oversee them, the laws of the land and the laws enacted by their employers. Wives need to be obedient to their husbands as we see in Ephesians 5 and Titus 2. Children need to be obedient to their parents as per Ephesians 6:1-3 and Colossians 3:20. Children need to learn obedience from their parents both by way of example and instruction in that precisely precious way. Far too many parents **talk** the truth to their children but do not **walk** the truth before their children. Jesus, as a youth, was obedient to Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:51). Had He been otherwise, He could not have increased (advanced) in favor with God and man (Luke 2:52). In pew packer classes for little children I have taught them that there are five great reasons why they should obey Dad and Mom. (1) God commands it. (2) Christ practiced it. (3)

It is right. (4) It will enable them to live longer. (5) They deserve it.

Obedience is not conspicuously present in most homes of the twenty-first century. Disobedience is far more likely to receive the welcoming nod from modern mates, parents and children. So many of society's grave problems can be laid at the feet of home dereliction and marital failure.

### **(14) Christ In The Home: A Precious Pillar**

Some thirty years ago I wrote a book entitled, **Christ In The Home**. Baker Book House in Grand Rapids published and kept it in print for about a dozen years. Quality in Abilene has published and kept it in print for nearly twenty years now. More than ever this concept deepens within my heart with the passing of each year. The Christ visited many homes while here in the flesh. Four would be Peter's home in Mark 1, Jairus' home in Mark 5, Mary's and Martha's home in Luke 10 and Zacchaeus' home in Luke 19. He was the welcomed guest in each of these homes—not the Divine Intruder. Two of these homes were located in Galilee; two were located in Judaea. There was a pressing need in each of these homes—sickness, death, for the wonderful words of life to be spoken and for salvation to be conferred. He addressed each of these needs by healing, in restoring life, in teaching Mary and correcting Martha on priorities and bequeathing salvation to a chief publican's home. He left each home better than He found it. This is not always true with modern visitors. Frequently, they leave homes worse

than they found them initially. In such cases they depart from the eloquent example set by the visiting Christ in this quartet of homes. It is still true that some people create joy **wherever** they go while others create joy only **when** they leave. Regardless of our needs in the home, He can and will help if we allow Him. How desperately does the home of the twenty-first century need Him. He is the precious panacea for marital difficulties and family problems. I frequently close a lesson on marriage and the home by asking three questions. (1) What has Jesus Christ meant to our homes in the past? (2) What does He mean to our homes **right now**? (3) What is He going to mean to them in the future? There is not much we can do about the past except repent, making things right and profit from our errors but there is much we can do about the present and even more about the future if such we are granted on this mundane sphere. Brightly and beautifully, **Christ In The Home** says it best.

### **(15) Heaven-Bound: A Precious Pillar**

As per Hebrews 11:8ff Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Jacob were all heaven-bound. Note the unique usage of precious pronouns in verse 13-16. They desired to go there and sought with diligence to make their calling and election sure. In Matthew 8:11 Jesus made crystal clear that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would grace the heavenly world with their precious presence. Aquila and Priscilla were heaven-bound. So were the apostles and brethren of the Lord along with their dedicated wives whom they led with them on their



journeys for Jesus. So were the Christian husbands and wives delineated with delight by the peerless Peter in I Peter 3:7. Their prayers were not to be short-circuited on the way to heaven and neither would their journeys together for the next world of glory be thwarted.

An older couple were having their family devotional. He was blind. She was reading John 11. At one point he interrupted her by saying, *“Wife, read that verse again about the Lord being the resurrection and the life.”* They were on their way to heaven—traveling together. They had been together in the past, were together in the present and would be together in the future. Here are the three tenses of comprehensive piety and hope.

### **Conclusion**

Friend, what about you and your family? Are you heaven-bound? If not, you need to hear Christ, believe in His Deity, repent of sins, confess Him in the here and now that He may confess you in the there and then and be immersed in water for the remission of sins. Then live loyally, faithfully and fervently the Christian life in working, worshipping, waiting and watching. These are the four great W’s of Christian living. These will make for precious pillars upholding and insuring happy homes now and the heavenly home ultimately.

## Chapter 12

# *“My Lord And My God”* **In Working With Young People**

*Jimmy Clark*



Jimmy has been preaching for over twenty years ~ He presently preaches for the Bethel Church in Athens, Alabama, for over sixteen years ~ He received his formal education at Freed Hardeman and Southern Christian University ~ Jimmy has worked in various evangelistic campaigns (Thailand, Australia, Mississippi, and others) ~ Jimmy’s parents were the late Winfred and Polly Clark ~ Jimmy and Pam have three children.

**E**very generation must come to have the faith that is needed to please God. It is written,

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him (Heb. 11:6).

The listing of the people in Hebrews 11 indicates both young and old alike. It was not enough for one generation to appreciate the Lord God. Every generation must hold dear the faith needed to live in this life. One only has to go to the book of Judges to see the need for every generation respecting the Lord God.

And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great

works of the Lord, that he did for Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel (Judges 2:7-10).

The heart of the thinking of that generation which left the Lord as their God is seen in the passage

In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25).

There is within the pages of the scriptures the message of God that draws every generation to worship and serve the proper object of reverence. Look at three factors found in the Scriptures which address working with young people to bring them to a spiritually mature state. Since it was the Lord God who created man, then it is the Lord God who knows what is best for mankind. There are strong areas of influence, both good and bad, that must be understood in order to both work within the lives of youth and to warn them of the dangers that certainly do exist.

## **PARENTING**

When children are born into the world, they are born under the care of parents. God did not design young people to be brought into the world without parental influence. Young people need proper

guidance. It was Jeremiah who stated, “...it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Solomon wrote, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered” (Prov. 28:26). Again, “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame” (Prov. 29:15). Samson’s own father said it best when it came to the knowledge that he was going to be a father, “And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him” (Judges 13:12). Working with young people begins in the home.

Moses said of the training of young people,

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:  
And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all  
thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all  
thy might. And these words, which I command  
thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou  
shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and  
shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine  
house, and when thou walkest by the way, and  
when thou liest down, and when thou risest up  
(Deut. 6:4-7).

Young people gain their first impression of God through their parents. Paul wrote of the training of children,

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to  
wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and  
admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4).

Along with that training comes the responsibility to apply it on the part of the child.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth (Eph. 6:1-3).

When the children of Israel had crossed the Jordan river, twelve stones were taken and placed at that site. Joshua said of those stones,

And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the Lord your God for ever (Josh. 4:21-24).

The stones themselves would have no meaning without the proper teaching. God did not simply let the fathers find the words to teach the children. He gave them the words to say so that each generation would know the accuracy of the place and the power of God. This is one of the great challenges of parenting. Parents need to make sure that they themselves know the meaning of the passages of the Bible and how they apply to living before they can pass such on to their children. Faithfulness in attendance and service must come from a proper appreciation and application of the meaning of the work of God in the word as revealed by the Scriptures.

## PEERS

Another factor that influences young people is their peers. It is inevitable that young people are going to reach out beyond their family to those with whom they share things in common. Parents need to make sure that they are aware of the associates of their children. Solomon had much to say about peers in the book of Proverbs.

He that walketh with wise men shall be wise:  
but a companion of fools shall be destroyed  
(Prov. 13:20).

Whoso keepeth the law is a wise son: but he  
that is a companion of riotous men shameth his  
father (Prov. 28:7).

One can see from these passages that there are both good and bad peers.

David said, *"I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts"* (Psm. 119:63). Walking with wise men will always be a blessing in life. One of the greatest peers that influences youth are those who are their potential spouse. The closest human relationship is found in marriage. Adam said of the woman when she was brought by the Lord to him, *"And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man"* (Gen. 2:23). The principle of marriage is then stated by Moses, *"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh"* (Gen. 2:24). It is through the influence of a good wife that many men have been able to serve God. When one thinks of

Aquila, Priscilla comes to mind (cf. Acts 18:2, 26; Rom. 16:3-5). Solomon truly said of such women, *"Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord"* (Prov. 18:22). This wife of Proverbs 18:22 is tied to the wife of Proverbs 31, where it is written, *"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies"* (Prov. 31:10). The statement made by the Shulamite woman of her husband set forth the kind of influence that men ought to be to their wives. *"His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem"* (Song of Solomon 5:16).

In addition to a spouse are those friends that are great encouragers. David and Jonathan were of like spirit for good (cf. I Sam. 18:1). Paul and Barnabas were fellowlaborers (cf. Acts 11:25-26). Paul mentioned many names of those who were influences for good (cf. Rom. 16:1-15). It is very important to be acquainted with the godly in this life.

On the other hand, there are influences for evil among peers. This can be true among one's family and friends. Jesus Himself said, *"And a man's foes shall be they of his own household"* (Matt. 10:36). The Scripture does not say in vain, *"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners"* (I Cor. 15:33). It was Adam's own wife that led him to sin (Gen. 3:6, 17). What could have been the life of Amnon, David's son, were it not for Jonadab, his friend (cf. II Sam. 13:3-5)? Solomon's own son, Rehoboam listened to those of his own age rather than the wisdom of those older (cf. I Kings 12:6-15). Even Peter played the

hypocrite when certain Jews came from Jerusalem to Antioch where he was, even influencing Barnabas to do the same (cf. Gal. 2:11-13). The influence of peers, whether good or bad, must be considered carefully.

## PRINCIPLES

The final word on any life, especially of young people, is that of living by vital principles of the Bible. Solomon wrote,

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment. Therefore remove sorrow from thy heart, and put away evil from thy flesh: for childhood and youth are vanity. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them (Eccl. 11:9-12:1).

One of the first principles to incorporate is respect for God. Solomon wrote, *"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction"* (Prov. 1:7). There can be no learning without respect. Where there is respect for God, there is the willingness to learn. Cornelius portrayed that attitude when he said to Peter,

Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God (Acts 10:33).



Another principle is to have a great desire to learn what one respects. Solomon also wrote,

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God (Prov. 2:1-5).

Faith comes, not through feelings, but through the knowledge of the word of God (cf. Rom. 10:17). One may think himself to be right when he can be completely wrong (cf. Prov. 14:12).

A third principle is that of integrity. One must always look at the truth with an honest heart. Solomon wrote, *"The integrity of the upright shall guide them: but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them"* (Prov. 11:3). Even Jesus said to the good soil,

But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience (Luke 8:15).

Such was true of those three thousand souls on the day of Pentecost who heard Peter preach (cf. Acts 2:37-41). Such was true of the eunuch who heard Philip expound unto him the meaning of Isaiah 53 (cf. Acts 8:31).

Along with such integrity is the desire to hold to the truth regardless of the sacrifice. Solomon wrote, *"Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction,*

*and understanding*" (Prov. 23:23). Genuine love does not rejoice in iniquity, only in the truth (cf. I Cor. 13:6). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "*Prove all things; hold fast that which is good*" (I Thess. 5:21). Paul wrote to Timothy,

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

The strength and energy of young are greatly needed in the cause of Christ today. They are the church of today and the future leaders of tomorrow. Paul placed great training and confidence in Timothy to do the Lord's work. That influence in the life of Timothy lived on after Paul was dead. The value of faith and love in the lives of people whether they be young or old are vitally needed in every generation.

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## Chapter 13

# *“My Lord And My God”* **In Burden Bearing**

*Fred House*

Fred has been faithfully preaching the gospel for 40 years • He has worked with congregations in Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi • He is the author of **“Why I Left The Baptist Church”** • Presently he is preaching in mission meetings throughout the land, under the oversight of the East Hill Church in Pulaski, TN • Joy and Fred currently live in Fulton, Mississippi • They have 3 children and 5 grandchildren.



I am without the appropriate words to express how honored I am to have been asked to speak on this important and growing lectureship. I extend my grateful and humble appreciation to the elders, preachers, and members of the East Hill church of Christ. Your concern relative to getting the Good News of Christ Jesus worldwide is to be commended. This will be echoed by each one who will preach and by those who pray! Thank you brethren for your commitment. **“Burden Bearing”** is my assigned task at this hour. The Scriptures which deal with this subject are many, and all invaluable. I wish to consider first the purpose of burden bearing.

### **THE PURPOSE WILL INVOLVE OTHERS**

The inspired apostle Paul wrote addressing this very point.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

The desire for our burdens to be lifted and have comfort may be a very high or a very low, a noble or a most ignoble wish. It is like the love of life, the wish to keep on living, which may be full of courage and patience, or it may be nothing but a cowardly fear of death.

The difference in the way in which people ask for relief from our burdens and be given comfort of God, no doubt, depends very largely upon the reason why we ask it, upon what it is that makes us wanting God to help and take away our pain and comfort us. All this, I think, applies to what Paul says about the comfort which God had given him. He gave to it its deepest and most unselfish reason, and so the fact of God helping help to bear his burdens became the exaltation and the strengthening of his life. The comfort Paul received in his burden about the church at Corinth is not to be overlooked, but could it not have been for many other things? The point is this...Paul thanked God because the comfort he sought and received gave him the power or ability to comfort other people. Friends, try to recall the joy, peace, and thankfulness that filled your hearts when you were burdened down in the struggles of life and God comforted you and opened His hand to shed upon you some great blessing. Remember how the sense

that He loved you occupied your soul? Think how your own happiness filled you with kindness to other people. Now, ask yourself: Did any such thought as this come up first and foremost to your mind, and seem to you the most precious part of all your blessing, that God had done this for you just to make you a fitter and more transparent medium through whom He might send His comfort to other people? When He lifted you up from the gates of death, did you thank Him most of all that your help had made clear to some poor sufferer beside yourself how truly God is the Lord of both life and death? I am called upon to bear burdens; do I praise Him most devoutly that my comforted and blessed life could become an epistle to make note of His perfect friendship? This, I say, was the beauty of God's comfort to Paul. *"Blessed be God who comforteth us, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble."*

If there is doubt or a question making you unsure that the comfort given you during your great burden is of God; if, whatever pious words you use about it, the recovery of your health, the saving of your fortune, or some other blessing received, seems to you a piece of luck, then you may be miserably selfish about it. We joyfully face the fact that God meant it for a wider circle than our own little life can cover, and therefore breaks through our selfishness to find for itself the purpose or mission that it claims!

Christ never said we would not have burdens...we really do. Therefore, we must have a genuine unselfish-ness and a true humility. We must

have the faith and love to look beyond ourself, a yearning and instinctive desire to know what comes to us in burden bearing will change the lot and life of other people. All-in-all when such come together we are able to clear away the obstructions which stop God's mercy short, and absorb, as personal privileges, what the comfort was meant in radiating blessings to mankind. Who is able to put this together with glad and clear understanding? I think it would be the reverent, the unselfish, and the humble person. Reverence, humility and unselfishness are the elements of true stewardship even in the time of heavy burdens or during the most trying of circumstance. Where is the person who in his mighty struggles receiving comfort from God radiates it so the world is richer by the help God has given him? It is the reverent, the unselfish, and the humble! The sunlight falls upon a clod, and the clod drinks it in, is warmed by it itself, but lies as black as ever, and sheds out no light. However, the sun touches a diamond, and the diamond almost chills itself as it sends out in radiance on every side the light that has fallen on it. Likewise, God helps one person bear the pain, and nobody but that one person is a whit the richer. God comes to comfort another sufferer, but this one is reverent, unselfish and humble, and the wretched are comforted all around by the radiated comfort of that happy soul!

The man who has really reached the point of understanding that what God does for us in our burden bearing has purposes beyond the one helped and into the life and the good of others, comes to a

deeper knowledge of the love of God! Then a new sacredness appears in the kindness when its designs are known, and as gratitude grows reasonable it grows deeper. So it is with gratitude to God. The one who thinks only of himself begs for a kindness which is to have no end beyond himself.

### VICTORY OVER BURDENS

Again Scriptures to this point surely are many. I wish however, to place one before us.

I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:9).

Entering into the privilege he has in Christ, he has also entered into its responsibilities. As John has placed Christ to be the center of his life, he has also entered into the fellowship of His suffering. Not only does he share in the sufferings of his Lord, but he shares in the sufferings or burdens of his fellow Christians. He has been so loyal and faithful to his Master that his faith has gotten him into trouble with man. He must bear some burdens. Let it be stated that Christianity has had a way of doing that through the centuries. That, however, comes as no surprise to us! *“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”* (2 Tim. 3:12). If we are sailing over seas that are always glossy, if we are never buffeted by any rude winds of opposition, it is wise for us to look well to our chart and compass, because the chances



are that we are headed for a wrong port. John's faith in the Messiah got him into trouble with man. But, view the latter part of 2 Timothy 3:11, "...persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me."

What sort of burden did John bear? He had been thrust away to the Isle of Patmos. Here John was shut away from all those outward supports that had strengthened him in other days. There was the burden of such that shut him away from the companionship of Christian friends. He was now away from the privileges of worship with fellow saints. He was shut away from the privilege of preaching to a devoted congregation. The atmosphere in which John was moved, I dare say, was one chilled by misunderstanding and antagonism. This burden caused John to notice that the sea was a prison wall which shut him in away from those he loved the most. Life, it seems, is constantly bringing us into some kind of Patmos. That is to say, it brings us into circumstances which burden our souls so weighty that our bearing them will never be done without help from God.

How did John react to his trying experience? This is a most important question. Our circumstances, whether favorable or unfavorable, may be vastly important. John refused to let the circumstances at hand master him. He refused to surrender and give over to the burdens. Paul's letter to the Romans may help us with this. Paul said,

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day

long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For 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 (Rom. 8:35-39).

This man of God, John, might have surrendered to the burdens that are now his by becoming discouraged. Why would he not say, *“Why keep on? Why continue to fling myself against such odds?”* Would you agree that this is a mood that is very prevalent in these trying times? With the whole world on fire, how futile seems the effort for me to put out the flames. Is not the burden of such just too great for one like me? This type of attitude is especially threatening today. There are two things we need placed before us now. First, there are those who become so discouraged with their burdens that they feel that not even God can help. How sad. Second, there are also those who grow so foolishly optimistic in prosperous days that they feel there is no burden they themselves cannot handle, therefore, they feel they no longer need God’s help. How sad. We read in the book of Deuteronomy this striking statement:

But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation (Deut. 32:15).

Again, how sad, and yet how human. We have all seen that happen. No doubt we all can think of some who were of beautiful simplicity and usefulness until success was dumped into their laps. Then they became self-sufficient and forgetful of God. The prophet Jeremiah wrote of some like this: “...my people have forgotten me days without number” (Jer. 2:32).

With this same thought running through our mind, yet we find some who surrender to harsh circumstances by becoming sour and bitter. We are now faced with little or no comfort...we are surely burdened because our dreams fail to come true. We did not capture the prize upon which we set our heart. Result, we get a grudge against life. We may well state that from this tragedy not even gospel preachers are exempt. Years ago I knew a charming and gifted young preacher of God’s Word who was exceedingly popular. He had a very pleasing and an enthuasaistic appearance. His youthfulness gave him a peculiar charm, even among his seniors. I could say he was a very good preacher. Naturally everybody spoke great things about him. However, some years later he was sadly changed. The radiance had gone out of his skies. Fretfulness and peevishness had crept into his voice. He had become a man of the world rather than a man of the Word. He felt that his brethren and even God had given him a raw deal. He had become the most pathetic character one could meet...a soured preacher.

John, the inspired writer of Revelation chapter one and verse nine did far more than refuse to be mastered by circumstances; he mastered them! John

did not simply endure his burden or his situation...he used it. He did not merely make a brave defense; he made a victorious attack. Through his suffering, I think it fair to say, he became a better man, and a great example of faith in God. Through his sufferings no doubt his faith was made stronger, his love for righteousness made deeper, his usefulness a bright light for many others! Is this not what James said?

My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience (James 1:2-3).

This has also been the experience of countless thousands, and for us this day. So often has this been the case that when we think of the people who have helped us most, who have brought to us the largest enrichment, we generally realize that they are people who have had their hearts broken and who have learned their finest lessons in their garden of Gethsemane.

We ought to be able to do this with either our failures or successes. I believe it not to be out of order at all to say that MANY TIMES victory over triumph is often greater than victory over tragedy, burdens, or the loads of life. We praise the person who works his or her way up from poverty, and we are right in so doing. However, could not even greater praise be given to the one who has overcome and won the battle in face of the fact he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. Although a silver spoon was not in my mouth, and I often growled and have done so even of late; but it was my privilege to be reared on a

backwood farm. I soon learned that nothing grew on its own except weeds, unwanted grass, thorns, and hedge bushes. To make a living for the family was not easy. I really wanted comfort...like some place else rather than the farm. Nevertheless, I had many blessings that many people of good fortune have missed. Though I have gone from the farm to many places of the world, with many things learned, and I am grateful. I also believe the course of training I received that helped me to the most, though hard, was the one I had on that farm. Too often Easy Street leads to unthankfulness, ungodliness, and a foolish character. In fact, I can point you to such a person:

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God (Luke 12:16-21).

His success had taught him nothing.

May we view another person for our learning in this matter of **burden bearing**. There was a certain man named Lazarus whose lot was to bear great and heavy burdens. He was laid at the gate of the

successful rich man. He was full of sores. He was noted as a beggar, dogs of the street licked his sore covered body. He only received crumbs from the rich man. Did Lazarus become bitter? Did he renounce God? Did he despise the dogs, and hate the rich? No, no, NO! How do we know that he did none of this? Look at the comfort he received from God! *"Lazarus died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom."* Lazarus in all his burdens and loads of life is now comforted (Luke 16:19-25).

### **BURDENS SHOULD AND CAN CAUSE A SONG!**

I now turn your attention to the book of Exodus and chapter fifteen. This chapter opens with Israel's magnificent song of triumph on the shore of the Red Sea, when they had seen the great work which the Lord did unto the Egyptians. They had seen God relieve them of some burdens, and they now sing His praise and recount His mighty acts for their comfort. However, up to this moment, we have not heard so much as a single note of praise. We have heard their cry of heavy burdens and their deep sorrow as they toiled amid the brick-kilns of Egypt, and we have hearkened to their cry of unbelief when surrounded by what they deemed inseparable difficulties, but until now we have heard no song of praise. It was not until, as a greatly helped and burden relieved people, they found themselves surrounded by the fruits of God's promises in comfort that the triumphal hymn burst forth from the whole blessed and happy assembly. It

was when they emerged from the hundreds of years of burden bearing and able to gaze upon the rich spoils of victory which lay around them, that hundreds of thousands of voices were heard singing the song of victory.

As we view this recorded song in Exodus 15 and noting the very expressions, we do not find a single note about self, its doings, its sayings, its feelings, or its fruits; it is all about Jehovah, from beginning to end. It begins with, *"I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the Sea."* This is a specimen of the entire song. It is a simple record of the attributes and actings of Jehovah. In chapter fourteen, the hearts of the people had, as it were, been pent up by the excessive pressure or burdens of their circumstances; but in chapter fifteen, the pressure is removed, and they find full vent in a sweet song of thanksgiving. At this moment, self is forgotten... circumstances are lost sight of; one object, and but one, fills their vision, and that is the Lord Himself. No doubt their thoughts would fall in line with what Psalm 92, verse four states.

For thou, Lord, hast made me glad through  
thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy  
hands.

It is when poor, worthless self, with all its belongings, is lost sight of, and when Christ is truly our Lord and His word fills our hearts, then we can see how our burdens can cause the singing of praise, love, and thanksgiving! Let the heart be occupied with the pleasure of service, the love of caring, and the vision

of the acceptance of God's favor, then the bearing of our burdens create songs of praise to God!

Exodus 15 is for sure a fine specimen of a song of praise, and the language of a relieved people from some heavy loads, and are now celebrating the blessed day of comfort with praise to Him who helped them. Their voices rang out, *"The Lord is my strength and song, and He is become my salvation"* (Exod. 15:2). *"Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy"* (Exod. 15:6). *"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?"* (Exod. 15:11). *"Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation"* (Exod. 15:13). *"The Lord shall reign for ever and ever"* (Exod. 15:18). How comprehensive is the ranger of this song caused by the help received from their burdens. It begins with redemption and ends with the glory. It is liken unto a beautiful rainbow, of which one end dips in much sufferings and the other in the glory that follows. It is an outpouring of the soul produced by a view of God and His gracious and glorious doings!

Moreover, it does not stop short of the actual accomplishment of the Divine help, for they said in their song of thanks, *"Thou hast guided in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation."* Their burdens should have, and did cause this song, though they had just planted their feet on the margin of the desert. It was not the expression of a vague hope...it was not feeding upon



poor, blind chance. No, no, NO! When the soul is wholly occupied with the promises, love, and comfort of God, it is able to launch out into all the fulness of His grace, to bask in the sunshine of His mercy, and delight itself in the rich abundance of His loving kindness. There is not a cloud upon the prospect when the humble and obedient soul, taking its stand upon the eternal Rock on which redeeming love has set it in association with a risen Christ, and looks upon the gracious and helpful commands of an Almighty God and what He has prepared for all those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!

This will account for the peculiarly brilliant elevated, and marvelous character of all those bursts of praise which we find throughout sacred Scripture. Indeed, God fills the entire sphere of the soul's vision. How different is this from some of the songs we so often hear today expressed by more than a few. Their lyrics are so full of their failings, their feebleness, shortcomings, and weariness of their uncalled for and unwanted burdens. Such persons have not finished with themselves. They have allowed their burdens to blind their thinking and they cannot see the strength these burdens build, and they fail to walk through to the other shore of freedom.

May the inspired Word of God to the obedient person be that which will lead all His children into a fuller, clearer, worthy place, and privilege, as those who, being washed from their sins in the blood of Christ by obeying the Gospel are now ready to stand

before God, because of Him who has risen from the grave and is the glorified Head of His church. Although burdened, doubts and fears do not overcome them, for their obedient faith has not left a shadow of a foundation on which to build any doubt or a fear. See if you can see any doubt in what Paul said,

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:8-18\).

Therefore, the Christian's sweet privilege is ever to triumph in the battles of life. It is no wonder we sing,

*"O victory in Jesus, my Savior...all my love is due Him..."*

*"So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; and they went out into the wilderness of Shur: and they went three days into the wilderness and found no water" (Exod. 15:22).*

Friends, it is when we get into our wilderness of burdens that we are put to the test as to the real measure of our acquaintance with God and His Word. There is a freshness and an exuberance of joy connected with the opening of our Christian journey, but the perils of our wilderness is soon to be faced, and then, unless there is a deep sense of what God is to us, above and beyond everything else, we are apt to break down, and in our hearts turn back again into Egypt, or the ways of the world we have been so acquainted with in the past. The discipline of the wilderness is often needed, not to furnish us with a clear title to Canaan, but to make us acquainted with God as we feed upon the bread of His Holy Word! Let it ever be remembered, our burdens serve as a school to teach us invaluable lessons. With that stated, notice this,

And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live (Deut. 8:2-3).

It was God,

Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna,  
which thy fathers knew not, that he might  
humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to  
do thee good at thy latter end (Deut. 8:16).

### **IN BURDEN BEARING WE ASK, WHERE IS THE HEART?**

When God visited His people, and brought them forth out of the land of bondage, it assuredly was not for the purpose of suffering them to die of hunger and thirst in the wilderness. They should have known this. They ought to have trusted Him, and walked in the confidence of that love which had so gloriously delivered them from the horrors of the Egyptian bondage. Will we today know and always remember that it is infinitely better to be in the desert with God than in the brick-kilns of the world. But no; the human heart finds it immensely difficult to give God credit for pure and perfect love. Look, for a moment, at all the sorrow, suffering, misery, degradation, and burdens, which man has endured by reason of his having hearkened to the charming allurements of the evil one. Yet, this person never gives utterance to a word of complaint of his service, or of desire to escape from under the hand of the devil. It is sad to note that such a person is not discontented with satan, or weary of serving him. Again and again he reaps bitter fruits in those fields which satan has thrown open to him, and yet again and again he may be seen sowing the self same seed, and undergoing one burden after another with no comfort, except the lonely selfish ones.

The result? They walk in darkness because they have been blinded, and walk not in the light of the glorious Gospel.

How different it is in reference to God! When we have set out to walk in His way, we are ready, at the appearance of pleasure or trial to murmur and rebel. There are ten thousands of mercies, and we must not let these be forgotten in the presence of a single trifling trial or hardship. May we forever remember that we have been forgiven of all our past sins, "*accepted in the Beloved,*" made heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. The expectants of eternal glory, and in addition, the path through our wilderness or desert is sown with countless mercies! Each day we are allowed to live and look at our Christian duty, and we keep before us the example of Christ, for there we find greater courage to endure and overcome every struggle. In all our burdens, and with us trying to find out where our heart is, look at Christ, the perfect One. Note Him in the wilderness and fasting forty days and tempted by the devil. How did He carry Himself? Did he murmur? Did he complain of His lot? Did He wish Himself in other circumstances? No, he did not! He would say with David, as we ought to say today, "*The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot*" (Psm. 16:5). When the tempter approached and offered Him the Necessities, the glories, the distinctions, and the honor of this life, He refused them all, and tenaciously held fast the position of absolute dependance upon God and implicit obedience to His Word. He would only take bread from God, and glory from Him likewise.

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Watch the people of Israel, for it was very different with them. No sooner did they feel the pain of hunger, and because of this great burden now upon them did their hearts faint.

And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness (Exod. 16:2).

They had actually lost the sense of having been delivered by the mighty hand of Jehovah, and the position of their hearts told on them, by the words they spoke.

And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst? (Exod. 17:3).

Thus did they, on every occasion, and their heart showing the evidence of a fretful, murmuring spirit, and prove how little they realized the presence and the hand of their Almighty and Infinitely Gracious Deliverer. Nothing is more dishonoring to God than the manifestation of a complaining heart on the part of those who belong to Him. No matter how severe the burden may be. Paul spoke of some whose heart was known of God, and it was not good.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools (Rom. 1:21-22).

Friends, the heart that ceases to retain a thankful sense

of God's goodness will speedily become dark. The people of Israel serve as our example. They lost the sense of being in God's hands; and this led, as might be expected, to still thicker darkness, for we find them further on in their history saying,

And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? (Num 14:3).

Such is the line along which a soul, though burdened, and whose heart is out of communion will travel.

The people being the subjects of His care, are provided for, and the Scriptures furnish us the marvelous account of this provision. Their hearts continue to long for the flesh-pots of their former life; but God kept saying and kept showing "*He careth for you*" (I Peter 5:7). He said, I will give you "*bread from heaven.*" Blessed contrast from what Egypt offered and what God offered! How amazing the difference between the flesh-pots, the leeks, onions, and garlic of Eypgt, and the heavenly manna. This heavenly foot was a test of Israel's condition of the heart, as we read, "*That I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law or no*" (Exod. 16:4). They needed a heart weaned from Egypt's influences, to be satisfied with or enjoy "*bread from heaven.*" If those who are redeemed from this present evil world do not walk with God in thankfulness of heart, satisfied with His provision for the redeemed, then they are in danger of falling into the snare of the wayward structure of our present society, which is starving itself spiritually.

The way of God not only at this time was rejected, but was so in time past.

Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein (Jer. 6:16).

This is a serious consideration. It demands a heavenly taste to feed on the bread from heaven! It is our privilege, as those who have obeyed the Gospel of Christ, to feed upon Christ as *“the bread of life which came down from heaven”* (John 6:58). This is the food for our wilderness; our spiritual refreshment which will adequately sustain us in our burdened life. However, it is obvious that in order to enjoy such a portion as this, our hearts must be weaned from everything of this present evil world.

### CONCLUSION

Our lives are burdened and we must bear them. Therefore, we cry out as did Simon Peter, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life”* (John 6:68). The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, as the One who came from Heaven to be His people’s strength, is ineffably precious to the obedient world. As I walk with God through the desert, I shall be satisfied with the spiritual food which He provides! As a people journeying through this world full of burdens, we need an example of one who also journeyed down here in this burdened place. This the apostle Peter made very clear to the people with many burdens.



...when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps (1 Peter 2:20-21).

The children of Israel made their way through the wilderness. Egypt was behind them, Canaan before them, and the sand of the desert around them; they were called to look up to heaven for their supply. The wilderness afforded not one blade of grass, not one drop of water for the people longing for a promise land which was said to flow with milk and honey. Israel must learn that Jehovah alone was their portion. This is a most touching illustration of God's pilgrim people in this wilderness world! They have nothing here. The Christian's life, being heavenly, can only be sustained by heavenly things. Though in the world, the child of God is not of the world. The Christian's are making their way through this world filled with burdens to their birth-place, and sustained by the strength, comfort, or food from thence. Theirs is an upward and onward course, and our eyes are fixed upon "*Christ who is our life*" (Col. 3:4). The Christian traces Christ from the bosom of the Father to the cross, and from the cross to the throne, and finds Him, in every stage of His journey, and in every attitude of His life, to be most precious food for his weak and burdened life, and will find Heaven waiting for the heavy laden, and where rest is assured for the soul. AMEN!

## Chapter 14

# “My Lord And My God” In Trials And Persecution

*Perry B. Cotham*

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All Christians have trials in life. What should be **A** our attitude toward them? How can we survive in living the Christian life with them? These are important questions to consider with each one of us who are endeavoring to hold on to the Lord and not give up.

The primary purpose of Peter’s first epistle was to encourage those early disciples of Christ to remain faithful in spite of all their trials and persecutions, and to never give up. Many were the words of his exhortation. Let us note some of them. At that time he said:

ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations (trials, ASV): That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (I Peter 1:6-7).

Again he wrote:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye...But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (in this name, ASV) (I Peter 4:12-16).

James also wrote:

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation (perseverance under trial, NASB): 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).

Paul told the Christians that in regard to the glories that were to be revealed that their trials, however severe, would be for only a "*moment*" and were "*light*" in comparison to the "*far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*" that someday would be theirs (II Cor. 4:17).

God, who is the "*God of all grace*" and is the "*God of all comfort*" (II Cor. 1:3), will never forsake His own. Note this statement of Scripture, "*...for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*" (Heb. 13:5). How comforting to know that the Lord will not forsake His people! In common parlance this means that God will not let the Christian down in the time of trials and persecutions.

So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:6).

This is the proper attitude to take regarding persecutions and trials of life. Paul told the Christians *"that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God"* (Acts 14:22).

### **JESUS ENCOURAGED OBEDIENCE**

Christ taught His disciples that they are not to fear any of their enemies. The enemies at their worst could only *"kill the body,"* but could not *"kill the soul."* They could not harm the immortal spirit.

God is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Gr., **Gehenna**) forever.

And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt. 10:28; cf. Luke 12:4-5).

To suffer meekly whatever trials and persecutions may be brought upon Christians because of their loving obedience to the Savior's will is the proper attitude to take toward the enemies of Christ. The most cruel persecution, even unto physical death, is to be endured in preference to neglect of duty to God. Jesus said through John to the suffering of saints at Smyrna, *"...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life"* (Rev. 2:10). Die as a martyr if need be, but do not give up, is what Christ said to those early Christians.

## THE PRIVILEGES OF CHRISTIANS

In the majestic reading of Romans 8:31-39, Paul sets forth the exceedingly great and precious privileges all faithful children of God enjoy by asking a series of questions. He then concludes with admiration of the height and depth, and length and breadth of the amazing love of God in Christ Jesus which passeth knowledge (cf. Eph. 3:19).

The apostle dares all the enemies of the saints to do their worst by asking: *“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can (successfully, PBC) be against us?”* (v. 31). God is for and with His people. So, if He is for us, who can prevail against us as to hinder the Lord from granting us eternal life in heaven? Regardless of how great and strong and malicious the enemies of Christ may be, what can they do to keep God from blessing His children? Let Satan do his worst; God will take care of us. We have nothing to fear.

Paul continues,

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things (v. 32).

Think of what God has already done for our salvation. Then think of what, therefore, we may expect that He will do for us. He will *“freely give us all things”* needful and necessary for our happiness, for *“they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing”* (Psm. 34:10). God has done the greater, shall He not do the lesser?

Now note Paul’s rhetorical questions:

(1) *“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s*

*elect?* Does the law accuse them? *"It is God that justifieth"* (v. 33).

(2) *"Who is he that condemneth (and make it stand before God, PBC)?"* (v. 34). No earthly judge can do it. Christ is now at God's right hand, ever ready to make *"intercession for us"* (v. 34). The early Christians had many crimes laid against them: rebellion, sedition, etc., and the ruling powers condemned them. But, so what, reasoned Paul?

(3) *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"* (v. 35). Shall any external thing or being separate us as faithful children of God from the love of Christ? The answer is definitely NO. None shall. Nothing shall separate us from God's love.

- Again, Paul asks:
- |                                 |     |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| (a) <i>"shall tribulation?"</i> | No. |
| (b) <i>"or distress?"</i>       | No. |
| (c) <i>"or persecution?"</i>    | No. |
| (d) <i>"or famine?"</i>         | No. |
| (e) <i>"or nakedness?"</i>      | No. |
| (f) <i>"or peril?"</i>          | No. |
| (g) <i>"or sword?"</i>          | No. |

This is illustrated by a passage from one of the psalms: *"For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter"* (v. 36; cf. Psm. 44:22). So, we are not to think that it was strange of the Old Testament saints who at times had the same persecutions. We, likewise, may be *"accounted as sheep for the slaughter."* It is possible that some of the early cruel rulers thought no more of killing a Christian than they did of killing a sheep.

But Paul goes on to mention the inability of all

of these things to separate the obedient child of God from the love of Christ. Can they do it? No, by no means! All of this will not sever the bond of love and care between the Lord and true and faithful believers in Christ. The Lord will not cease to love us for any of this.

When Paul, for example, was whipped, and beaten, and stoned, and imprisoned, did the Lord cease to love him for this? Absolutely not! When in later life he was brought before the wicked ruler Nero for trial and *“all men forsook”* him, *“the Lord stood”* with him (II Tim. 4:16-17). (And we might add, the true Christian loves Christ none the less because at times he has to suffer for the cause of Christ.)

Thus Paul could say, *“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us”* (v. 37). The Christians were conquerors. The enemies were at times baffled by the invincible courage of the early martyrs who *“loved not their lives to the death”* (Rev. 12:11). Some went smiling to the stake and stood singing in the flames. They were *“more than conquerors.”* They could not be conquered.

(4) So, what is Paul’s conclusion of this whole matter?

For 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 (vs. 38-39).

Here he enumerates all those things which might be likely to separate between the Lord's love and believers and concludes that it could not be done. Christians shall not be separated from God's love either in life or in death. Time shall not separate them, and eternity shall not. Not anything that can be named or thought of can do it. They will not, they cannot separate us, said Paul, from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. None of these things that come upon us, or things from without can do it! Thank God! We are triumphantly victorious!

### SIN SEPARATES

Nevertheless, here is a serious misunderstanding in the minds of some people. Sin can separate the believer from God. The prophet Isaiah declared,

But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:2).

Note carefully these two questions:

(1) What can separate us from the love of God? The answer is **nothing** (cf. John 3:16; II Peter 3:9; Phil. 1:21, 23).

(2) What can separate the Christian from God? The answer is **sin** (cf. Isa. 59:2).

What people do to the obedient child of God cannot separate him from the love of God, but going into sin and becoming disobedient to the Lord will separate him from God. Does the Bible teach that a child of God can become unfaithful and so sin as to be finally and eternally lost? Indeed so. *"For my people*



*have committed two evils: they have forsaken me...."* (Jer. 2:13). So God's people can forsake the Lord.

Can a believer separate himself from God? Yes. How? By sin, by refusing to follow Christ. "*From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him*" (John 6:66).

For every one of the house of Israel...which **separateth himself** from me...I will set my face against that man...I will cut him off from the midst of my people (Ezek. 14:7-8).

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind...if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever (I Chron. 28:9).

The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him...but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you (II Chron. 15:2).

Some can "*depart from the faith*" (I Tim. 4:1; 1:19-20; cf. II Tim. 2:17-18).

If a child of God goes into sin and fails to repent and return to the Lord, he will be lost forever, in spite of God's love for him (cf. Acts 8:22; I John 1:7-9; II Peter 2:20-22; John 15:6). However, as long as the unfaithful child of God lives he should realize that God still loves him and wants him to return home. The Parable of the Prodigal Son clearly teaches this lesson (Luke 15:11-24). And the wayward child of God can repent and return home if he will (Ezek. 33:11, 14-15, 19; Isa. 55:7).

## PAY DAY SOME DAY

The early martyrs knew that God had promised to punish their persecutors. They knew that one day there would be a great and final judgment for all mankind (cf. Matt. 25:31-46; II Cor. 5:10). They had been taught not to return evil for evil but to leave the punishment up to the Lord and that He would take care of that in His own time. Paul wrote,

Render to no man evil for evil...Avenge not yourselves, beloved, but give place unto the wrath of God: for it is written, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense, saith the Lord (Rom. 12:17-19, ASV).

Again, *"For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord"* (Heb. 10:30).

A moving scene of the martyrs who lost their lives due to persecution is found in Revelation 6:9-11. Their souls *"under the altar"* were wondering when God would fulfill His promise and punish those who had put them to death.

And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?...and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled (Rev. 6:9-11).

As already noted, persecutors can only kill the body, and after that there is no more that they can do; their souls live (cf. Luke 23:43; 16:19-31). So these souls were willing to commit their cause to the Lord to whom vengeance belongs. The Lord told them to wait for a while and He would finally take care of it. He would punish their enemies. They remembered what had occurred on earth, for the soul does not cease to exist at death, and it does not cease to be conscious, or sleep until the resurrection. These departed souls did not doubt that God would some day avenge them, but they inquired how long the vengeance would be delayed. God let them know that pay day would come some day.

### CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study might well be summarized in the words of a familiar hymn:

Be not dismayed what-e'er betide,  
God will take care of you;  
Beneath His wings of love abide,  
God will take care of you.

Thro' days of toil when heart doth fail  
God will take care of you;  
When dangers fierce your path assail,  
God will take care of you.

No matter what may be the test,  
God will take care of you;  
Lean, weary one, upon His breast,  
God will take care of you.

God will take care of you,  
Thro' every day, O'er all the way;  
He will take care of you,  
God will take care of you.

~ C. D. Martin

Therefore, let us remember the encouraging words of Jesus:

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matt. 5:10-12).

And to these we add the words of Paul to the Christians at Corinth concerning their temptations:

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it (I Cor. 10:13).

In all of our trials and temptations we, as God's children, can always go to God in prayer:

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 (Heb. 4:15-16).

Hence, let us all hold on to the Lord and never give up! Our trials and afflictions can be helpful to us in strengthening our faith in Christ. Also, let us realize that our trials and afflictions can be helpful to the Lord's kingdom. Even while in prison at Rome Paul's **trials** of "*bonds and afflictions*" resulted in **triumphs** for the cause of Christ. While there he wrote to the Philippians that what had happened to him had "*fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel*" (Phil. 4:22; cf. Acts 20:23-24; 21:12-13).

Paul's "bonds" did not prevent him from being useful. He became instrumental in the conversion of many soldiers, and introduced Christianity throughout the "*palace* (praetorian guard, ASV), *and in all other places*" (Phil. 1:13). It was at this time also that he wrote his letters to the Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and to Philemon. The influence of these letters will continue to bless the world to the end of time. We are often poor judges of ultimate results. Hence, "*Paul, the aged*" (Phile. 9) did a great work for Christ even while in prison in Rome. It is not disgrace for any faithful child of God to have trials. It is how we use these trials that count.

Even earlier in his life, when he spoke of his "*thorn in the flesh*" (whatever it was), he said,

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me...for when I am weak, then am I strong (II Cor. 12:7-10).

Truly, "*God moves in mysterious ways His wonders to perform.*"

May we learn these lessons well concerning Christians and their trials. What man was more tireless in reaching the lost than the peerless apostle Paul? Heaven will be more populated because of him. It is not the length of our lives in years that counts, but what we do with them while we live. Let us always obey the Lord and all will be well with our souls.