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BEWARE

Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets (Acts 13:40).

No one can doubt or deny that Paul championed the cause of justification by faith. He has a great deal to say about salvation by grace, and about the love and mercy of God.

Some might be surprised, therefore, to find his sermons, and his writings filled with warnings to those who would reject the grace of God and trample under foot the blood of the covenant.

The passage in Acts 13:40 is recorded from a sermon which Paul preached at Antioch in Pisidia. That message of grace and love was concluded with a severe warning—"Beware!"

The quotation Paul used was from Habakkuk 1:5. It indicated that God was going to do something to Israel which they would not believe even if someone declared it unto them.

God determined to raise up the Chaldeans, a bitter and hasty nation to chastise the people of Israel.

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The Chaldeans were terrible and dreadful. Their horses were swifter than the leopards and more fierce than the evening wolves. Their horsemen would come from afar like the eagle that hasteth to eat. Those who can envision a predator like a leopard, a wolf, or an eagle tearing its prey will have keen insight into the judgment which God was going to bring to pass upon His people who rejected Him.

Ah! you say. That's from the Old Testament Scriptures. Surely God would never do anything like that now! Wrong! This is the very point of Paul's warning. The examples of God's wrath in ancient times are used as a teaching tool to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith.

The writer of Hebrews went so far as to say,

He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? (Heb. 10:28-29).

Before creation, God was all there was. There was no one to rebel or challenge His sovereignty in any way.

With creation, came rebellion. Man was not created like a robot with no ability to determine the course of his own destiny. He was created in the very image of God. He had the right to thumb his nose at Deity and to attempt to make himself the center of the universe in place of God.

The Scriptures teach that God will someday again be "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28). He will someday destroy every vestige of rebellion and once again be "everything to everybody."

Judgment is coming, but in the meanwhile God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to reserve the unjust unto punishment. He demonstrated this when he destroyed the old world and saved Noah and his family. He demonstrated this again when he destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrhah and delivered Lot (see II Pet. 2).

The first time He destroyed the earth by water, but the next time He will destroy it by fire,

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But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (II Pet. 3:10).

Betrayal?

I can almost sense that some of you will feel betrayed by this last chapter. You have been intrigued by an approach to God that is not legalistic, and now you feel that we are offering you "more of the same."

This is not so, and may I encourage you to be patient with me while I try to explain.

The law of Moses condemned people on the basis of their external actions. There was no way that human judges could analyze or assess the condition of a man's heart.

God, by contrast, discerns the thoughts and intents of our heart. This is why David is given to us as an example of someone whose iniquities were forgiven and whose sins were covered. He was a man after God's own heart.

Once Jesus and His disciples were condemned for eating with unwashed hands. Jesus took this opportunity to explain that the things which happen to you externally cannot defile you. The things which defile you come from within.

For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: ALL THESE EVIL THINGS COME FROM WITHIN, AND DEFILE THE MAN (Mark 7:21-23).

The law of Moses condemned people for their external actions, but the final judgment will not only take into consideration the deeds of the body, but also the secrets of men's hearts.

The Secrets of Men

In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel (Rom. 2:16).

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When the people of Israel came to worship at the tabernacle or temple, they could go through all the motions of religion, without a poor and contrite spirit.

Isaiah wrote specifically about this problem,

He that killeth an ox is as if he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, as if he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, as if he offereth swine's blood; he that burneth incense, as if he blessed an idol. Yea, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delighteth in the abominations (Is. 66:3).

The old covenant involved externals. You could go through all of the motions hypocritically. You could honor God with your actions and your lips while your heart was far from Him.

The New Covenant, however, is not in Jerusalem, but rather in the heart of every true believer. To dishonor God in your heart is the greatest crime of all.

Ananias and Sapphira provide us with a good illustration of a corrupted heart. On the outside they did nothing offensive, but their hearts were not right with God. Note the way that the Scriptures focus on the source of their defilement and corruption:

. . . why hath Satan filled *thine heart* to lie to the Holy Ghost . . . ?
(Acts 5:3)

. . . why hast thou conceived this thing in *thine heart*? . . . (Acts 5:4)

Or consider the case of Simon the Sorcerer:

. . . *thy heart* is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of *thine heart* may be forgiven thee. . . . (Acts 8:21-22)

When the people in Rome rejected the grace of God, Paul was reminded of these words of Isaiah:

For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them (Acts 28:27).

GOD'S FINAL JUDGMENT WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN'S HEARTS!

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The Sermon on the Mount

Before we consider the way that the Sermon on the Mount emphasizes the importance of a pure heart, let us consider these words of Jesus about His fulfillment of the law.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:17-20).

The Sermon on the Mount was not just "one" sermon which Jesus delivered and never repeated, it was representative of the way that He taught all the time.

It is therefore appropriate that Jesus establish His teaching as a "fulfillment" of God's eternal plan, rather than some heretical doctrine which was contrary to it.

The word "fulfilled" occurs quite a number of times in the Gospel of Matthew. Here are a few examples earlier in the book which will help us to focus on what the Holy Spirit meant by fulfilling the law.

The journey of Christ to Egypt until the death of Herod "fulfilled" the prophecy of Hosea (Matt. 2:15). The slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem "fulfilled" the prophecy of Jeremiah (Matt. 2:17). The fact that Jesus dwelt in Nazareth "fulfilled" the prophecy that He would be called a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23). The ministry of Jesus in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim "fulfilled" the prophecy of Isaiah (Matt. 4:14).

Then we are informed that Jesus did not come to destroy the law, but to "fulfill" it.

The law of the Lord is perfect. Certainly we have no right or reason to be critical of God's law.

God's prophetic utterances are also perfect. We have no right or reason to be critical of them.

But the law and the prophecies are incomplete without a fulfillment. By themselves they are only partial and inadequate. When filled with the fulness of Christ they assume a new beauty and significance.

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The purpose of the law, as we have stated so frequently, was to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by a principle that transcends carnal law . . . that transcendent principle is the law of faith.

Many of the Jews, however, settled down in union with the law as though it were an end in itself, instead of a means to an end. This can only be done by twisting, or perverting the law from its intended purpose.

So Jesus had special warnings for those who would "break" one of the least commandments. The Greek word translated as "break" is from "luo" which means "to loosen." It is not a flagrant confrontation with law, but rather an infringing loosening of the law which Jesus condemned.

The Scribes and Pharisees are perfect examples to be avoided. Rather than face up to the full impact of the law and admit their utter destitution and guilt, they "loosened" the law so that they could live with it. These traditions which "loosened" the law of God actually made the Word of God of none effect (Mark 7:13, etc.).

The reason why these men did not come to Christ in order that they might be justified by faith, is that they had perverted the purpose of the law and established a righteousness of their own. Instead of being humbled in guilt by law, they became proud and self-righteous.

As long as Pharisees like Saul of Tarsus considered themselves blameless with reference to the righteousness of the law, there was no need for them to come to Christ that they might be justified by faith.

It is necessary for someone to recognize that he is lost, before he will recognize his need of salvation. Certainly the followers of Jesus would have to be different from the Scribes and the Pharisees or they would never enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

After establishing the fact that He did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, Jesus then distinguishes between the law of Moses which involved only externals, and His law which involved the heart.

You have heard thou shalt not kill . . . but Jesus taught against anger.

You have heard bring your gift to the altar . . . but Jesus taught the priority of relationships.

You have heard not to commit adultery . . . but Jesus taught against lust.

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There are a whole series of contrasts between what they had heard and what Jesus was now telling them.

Each of these contrasts focuses upon the condition of the heart. There is a sense in which I am the sovereign over my own heart. As long as I maintain this egotistical self-rule I am a pitiful victim of a mighty poor administration.

The smartest thing that one can ever do is open his heart and let Jesus come in. When Jesus is enthroned in our hearts, we experience such a radical transformation that it is described in the Scriptures as being "born again."

To reject His Lordship . . . is to be damned!

An Invitation to Glory

God is Eternal - (Deut. 33:27; Ps. 90:2; Rev. 4:8-10)

Incorruptible - (Rom. 1:23)

and Invisible - (Job 23:8-9; John 1:19; 5:37; Col. 1:15;
I Tim. 1:17)

With no desire to detract from the reality of God, He is, at least in some respects to the human family, an abstraction.

Man is unique in the world of created things in that he has the capacity to think abstractly. Man can love and worship God even though God is invisible.

Peter expressed it beautifully, ". . . Whom having not seen, ye love . . ." (I Pet. 1:8).

James Strong in his Exhaustive Concordance associates the Greek word for "worship" with the way a dog licks his master's hand. The dog has five senses. He can see, hear, touch, taste and smell. He does not, however, possess the capacity to love a master whom he has never seen and cannot experience physically.

Just as the heavens are high above the earth, our Infinite God transcends the finite world in which we live. Since the earliest moments of recorded history, however, God has been about the business of self-disclosure. He has been trying to communicate His nature to man whom He created in His very image.

Human parents face a similar problem as they cradle a newborn infant in their arms. The infant has virtually no capacity to comprehend his father's mind even though he is in a sense, also created in the very image of his father.

Thus God, in the infancy of the world, cradled mankind in His loving arms and tried to teach us of His love. Since we were created in His image He wanted us to understand His nature and to grow up as His children to be like Him.

One word which is used quite frequently in association with God's revelation of Himself to man is the word "glory." The word is difficult to define because it contains a dimension that is abstract or transcendent.

For example, the Hebrew people came out of Egypt into the barren wastelands of Sinai. There they began to murmur and complain about their dismal circumstances. At this juncture the Lord promised Moses that He would rain bread from heaven and Moses said to the Hebrew people, ". . . And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the Lord . . ." (Ex. 16:7).

Later as Aaron was speaking unto the congregation, ". . . they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in a cloud . . ." (Ex. 16:10).

It is difficult to describe or define exactly what happened as God's glory became manifest to Israel. Perhaps it was something that was easier experienced personally than described to others.

The Hebrew word translated as "glory" in this passage is the word "kabob." It comes from the root word "kabad" which means "to be heavy, or weighty." This root occurs 376 times in the Hebrew Bible. A literal use of the word is found in I Samuel 4:18 where we are informed that "Eli was heavy . . ." and again in II Samuel 14:26 where we are told that "Absalom's hair was heavy."

Perhaps the association of this root word with glory is not totally dissimilar to our own use of the word "heavy" in the modern vernacular. We not only refer to a heavy object but also to a "heavy" experience. By this we communicate our own difficulty with the experience. It is "heavy" or "weighty" and causes us to summon all of our mental energies to deal with it.

So the "glory" of God was manifest at the giving of the law at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 24:16-18; Deut. 5:24). The tabernacle was to be sanctified by God's glory (Ex. 29:43). When the tabernacle was erected Moses was unable to enter the tent because the "glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:35).

The same phenomenon occurred at the construction of the temple.

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So that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord (I Ki. 8:11).

God's glory appeared when the people complained because of the lack of water (Nu. 20:6), when Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were destroyed (Nu. 16:19ff.), and when Israel was in danger because of the evil report brought back by the spies (Nu. 14:10). All of these were "heavy" experiences. There were physical manifestations with profound spiritual implications.

The Hebrews said "glory!"

The versatile Greek language is remarkably inexplicit with reference to the word glory. As a matter of fact, twenty-five different Hebrew words are all translated in the LXX by the Greek word "doxa" or "glory."

The word "doxa" comes from the root "dokeo" which means "to seem." In secular Greek its basic meaning was "opinion, or conjecture." The Dictionary of New Testament Theology lays special stress upon the "impression" created by manifestations of "glory" and feels that this aspect is essential for our understanding of the concept (Vol. II, p. 45).

So again we are set adrift with a "heavy" experience to ponder and about which to form "opinions and conjectures."

The word "doxa" is found 165 times in the New Testament Scriptures and derivations of the word are used many more times.

Sometimes we use the word "Shekinah" to refer to the presence of God among men. "Shekinah" is a non-biblical term and comes from the Hebrew word which means "to dwell." The use of this term as applied to God's presence arose among the Palestinian and Babylonian Jews, in contradiction to the Alexandrian teaching that God was above contact and communication with that which was human and mundane. It is used in the Targums and Talmud to bridge that gap between heaven and earth and was helpful in preparing the way for acceptance of the Messiah who was destined to "glorify" God upon the earth.

John's Gospel informs us that the "Word" "Tabernacled" among men and we beheld His "glory" (John 1:1). There are 18 occurrences of the term "glory" in John's Gospel and only 23 in Matthew, Mark, and Luke combined. Just as God's glory radiated in brightness from the Tabernacle, the Light of Jesus shined out in such away that the darkness could not put it out.

There were times, however, when the glory of Jesus was more easily discernable than at other times. At His miracles, for example, he manifested forth "glory" (John 2:11; 11:40, etc.). At the transfiguration He appeared with Moses and Elijah in "glory" (Lk. 9:31; II Pet. 1:16ff.). When Stephen was stoned he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on His right hand (Acts 7:55). When Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus, Saul could not see for the "glory of that light" (Acts 22:11).

There is also a sense in which the sufferings of Jesus were an entrance into glory (Lk. 24:26). John 7:39; 12:16; 13:31ff.; 17:1ff., all refer to the death of Jesus in conjunction with glory. Hebrews 2:9 teaches that Jesus was crowned with glory and honor because of the sufferings of death. The Gospel of the cross proclaims the riches of His glory (Col. 1:27; Eph. 1:18). Paul gloried in the cross (Gal. 6:14), and Revelation 5:14 portrays the Lamb that was slain as worthy of "glory."

The Scriptures make many references to the "glory" which is associated with Christianity. There are many aspects of this "glory" which are better experienced than described.

There is an old story about the little boy attempting to describe the sweetness of honey. After several unsuccessful attempts to describe it he finally said in desperation, "you'll just have to taste it for yourselves."

Thus it is with the glory of receiving Jesus Christ as Lord. We can try to describe the glory of His presence in the Tabernacle or Temple, but we can never know that glory personally until we open the inner chambers of our heart and invite Him in.

We should not be surprised to discover that the same terms which are used to describe the intimacy of our relationship with Jesus are also used of the sexual intimacy which husbands and wives experience with one another.

Adam "knew" his wife and she conceived and brought forth a son. To "know" means to become intimate so that a new life is produced. Surely we need to "know" Jesus Christ as Lord.

Since our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and the woman is the "glory" of the man (I Cor. 11:7), the sexual relationship provides us with a foretaste of the glories to be experienced in the inner chambers of our heart when we are married to Jesus Christ.

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It is in this context in I Corinthians 6 that we are admonished to "flee fornication." Such behavior is utterly incongruous to those who have made their bodies temples of the Holy Spirit of God.

Opening the door of your heart is not done by accident, but by deliberate decision. Please prayerfully consider this invitation from Christ.

Behold I Stand at the Door and Knock

You and I are creatures who have been fashioned in the very image of God. We are sovereigns in our own little world. Like an autistic child, we possess the capacity to withdraw into this world. We can shut out everything else and everyone else who threatens our right to rule our own lives.

The law was given to point out the shambles we have created in our lives so that we would turn to Jesus for help.

Our initial reaction to the law is to blame someone else for the problems in our lives. Adam blamed Eve; Eve blamed the serpent. But the Scriptures teach that a person is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed (Ja. 1:14). Our problem with sin is not from without, but from within. From within proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, etc.

This then is our dilemma. The problem is not from without but from within. The problem is with my own will. *Yet, I cannot by my own will overcome my own will.*

The solution to this dilemma is quite simple. We simply open our innermost self and invite in a helper.

Jesus has a standing invitation to do just that! Note this beautiful promise in Revelation 3:20,

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: and if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

This promise is not just for those who have never received Jesus Christ as Lord, but also for those who within the church need a greater measure of grace to face the rigors in this world of turmoil and temptation.

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As a matter of fact, the words of Jesus about standing at the door and knocking were originally written to the Church which was at Laodicea.

One of the beautiful words in our Bible used to describe the Holy Spirit is "parakletos." It is translated as "advocate" or "comforter" but it should be understood that the word itself basically refers to calling for help. "Para" means "beside" and "kaleo" means "to call."

Jesus reminds us that if we are evil and yet know how to give good gifts unto our children, how much more shall our heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him (Lk. 11:13)?

Literally millions of witnesses could be called upon to testify that our wonderful Lord will do just exactly what He promised to do.

Just last week I spent three days with a family that had faced an unusual amount of trouble and temptation. The wife has a terminal illness. Their marriage was falling apart. They had no medical insurance. In desperation the young wife and mother went out to a deserted road at 2:00 in the morning and severed an artery in her throat.

God who sends His messengers to minister in behalf of those who are the heirs of salvation sent an officer of the law out that night to check license plates. He had never done such a thing before and never expected to do it again, but on that night he was used by God to save a life.

Still running from the knock at the door of her heart, she left her husband and children and went to Kansas City where she found employment in a hotel. When she opened the drawer to put away her clothing, she was confronted with a Gideon Bible. She fell to her knees and for three hours was unable to utter a word.

Finally she opened the door to her heart. It was the innermost part of her being. Hitherto it had been a private domain. Now it was in shambles with not much left to save. But Jesus did just what He promised He would do. Like a Carpenter of Souls, He began a beautiful work of restoration in a broken life. I am thankful to report that severed relationships have been restored, sadness has been replaced with joy, the shadows of hopelessness and despair have given way to the sunshine of a bright today and the hope of eternal bright tomorrows.

It is important for you to know that the loving Savior is standing at the threshold and knocking at the door of your heart. Until you

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open the door and let Him in, your every activity will be plagued with the stench of death and the warnings of Scripture will hang like an albatross about your neck.

Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets . . . (Acts 13:40).

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Gal. 3:24).

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

1. How can God be a God of love and also a consuming fire?
2. What part do warnings have in Gospel sermons?
3. How could Paul say that he was "blameless" as touching the righteousness which is in the law (Phil. 3:5)?
4. Did anyone ever completely keep the Law?
5. The Old Covenant was written in stone and kept in an earthly tabernacle. Where is the New Covenant (Heb. 8:10)?
6. Define in your own words "glory."
7. What association is there between marriage and conversion?
8. How can our bodies become temples of the Holy Spirit?
9. Can I, by my own will, overcome my own will? Discuss!
10. Why would anyone not want Jesus to rule their hearts?