

The Message of Ed

The word "Ed" is a Hebrew word which means "witness" or "testimony." It is used in the Bible to refer to an altar constructed on the banks of the Jordan by the children of Reuben, the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh (Josh. 22:10,34). Consider with me the origin of this altar and the meaning and message which it holds for today.

The war of conquest for Canaan had come to a glorious conclusion and Joshua wisely disbanded his troops. The armies of Israel were now to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Its is interesting to observe that the two and one half tribes who were first to be assigned their inheritance were the last to be discharged so that they might enjoy it. The first verses of Joshua 22 describe the honorable discharge of these valiant men. They had been courageous and obedient in all that they were commanded to do. Now they returned to their tents with the blessing of Joshua and the spoils of war. As they departed Joshua urged them to "take diligent heed to do the commandments of the law" and to strictly adhere to the doctrine of Jehovah.

When the departing warriors came to the borders of Jordan they paused to construct a gigantic altar. The implications of this act were frightening and appalling. Moses had specifically commanded the people of God to worship at one altar (Deut. 12:5-14). They were not to make "burnt offerings in every place . . ." but were to faithfully journey to the one place where the Lord had chosen to put His name. The suspicion of apostasy was intensified by the "pattern" of the altar. Exodus 20:25 forbade the use of tools in the making of stone altars. Since these altars were of unhewn materials they were usually just a "heap of stones" similar to the one constructed by Jacob and his servants (Gen. 31:46).

The altar named Ed, however, had a definite pattern (Josh.

22:28) – probably fashioned after the horned altar of the tabernacle. The children of Israel were well aware of the penalty for rebellion against Jehovah. The iniquity of Peor (Josh 22:17, Num. 25:3-4) and the trespass of Achan (Josh. 22:20; 7:1ff) were vivid in their memories. To tolerate such blasphemy would summon the wrath of heaven upon them, therefore they assembled at Shiloh to go to war against their own brethren. There was “sin in the camp” and the nation was prepared to spill the blood of its own brethren to exterminate it.

It is at this juncture that we need to pay particular attention. You cannot always tell what a brother thinks, simply because of something which he does. Therefore, before the nation was plunged into fratricide ten representatives were sent to investigate the charge of heresy. Even though they were completely prejudiced against their brethren their efforts to avoid war are very commendable. “If the land of your possession be unclean, then pass ye over unto the land of the possession of the Lord, wherein the Lord’s tabernacle dwelleth, and take possession among us: but rebel not against the Lord . . .” (Josh. 22:19).

The response of the accused brethren was both gracious and restrained. They reaffirmed their loyalty to Jehovah without impugning the motives of their brethren who viewed them with suspicion. The first words they used were “The Lord God of Gods” or “El, Elohim, and Yehovah” the three main designations for God used by the sons of Jacob. They then proceeded to explain that the altar they built was not for burnt offerings and sacrifices at all (v. 26). Their motives had been completely and totally misunderstood. Instead of trying to revolt against God they were seeking to prevent such rebellion. They feared that in time to come their brethren on the West bank of Jordan would feel estranged from those on the East so they built this altar to preserve national unity and to insure that their descendants would never cease from fearing the Lord (v. 25).

So “the children of Reuben and the children of Gad call the altar Ed: for it shall be a witness between us that the Lord is

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God" (v. 34). In addition to this it is a monument which speaks volumes to brethren who disagree. It serves to temper our suspicions with restraint and encourage us to discussion and dialogue. It applies the brakes to factional warriors who would lay siege to the camp of brethren condemned "in absentia" for the "unscriptural" altar they have erected. It makes us wonder how many religious wars could have been avoided by an attitude that "suffered long" "was not easily provoked" and "hopeth all things." This is the message of Ed.

Esthesis and Gymnastics

Hebrews 5:14 contains two Greek words which are quite familiar to Mr. Average American. The first is the Greek word "aistheterion" which we use in "esthesia," "esthesis," etc., but is perhaps better known through our English word "anesthesia." The Greek word in the text is translated in the Authorized version as "senses," and it makes reference to the faculty of the mind for perceiving. It corresponds to our English word "esthesia" which means, "capacity for sensation and feeling." "Anesthesia," of course, is exactly the opposite. It means, "no feeling." a drug which destroys our capacity to feel is called an "anesthetic," and the one who administers this is termed an "anesthetist."

The second word to which I make reference is the Greek word "gegumnasmena" which forms the basis for such English words as "gymnastics," "gymnasium," etc. It is translated as "exercised" in the text. It means to exercise vigorously as an athlete in training for competition. It is also used in Hebrews 12:11 to describe the way that chastening enhances our training for God. It is, therefore, appropriate that Timothy be urged to "exercise" himself unto godliness, and that he be reminded that "bodily exercise" profiteth little, but godliness is profitable unto all things (I Tim. 4:7).

With this brief introduction let us now consider the text: "But the strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their *senses exercised* to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:14).

Have you ever noticed how many young Christians are not sensitive to the evils which will destroy their witness for God. They may respond in all sincerity, "I can't see anything wrong with that." Their lack of sensitivity often leads them to go places and do things which maturity would have prompted them to avoid. The Proverbs teach, "A wise man feareth and

departeth from evil, but the fool rageth and is confident." The cure for this common malady is the vigorous exercise of our "senses." The constant use of our mental faculties and discernment will season us with perception into those things which are constructive. It will enable us to determine what is good and what is evil in a manner beyond the reach of the novice.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil . . ." He demonstrated this principle in His own life and frequently withdrew for prayer and solitude from situations which seemed harmless to his students. One such example occurred in conjunction with the feeding of the 5,000. At the very height of His popularity he first of all "constrained" His disciples to leave, dispersed the multitudes and "departed again into a mountain Himself alone." The ability to "feel" something amiss in a given situation is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the fact that He remained sinless in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

There is a reason why insurance premiums are high for young drivers. Their vision is keen, their reflexes are fast, and their ability to manipulate a vehicle is often superior to what it will be in later life. Their problem, however, is in their judgment. The unseasoned driver will attempt many things which maturity would preclude. Thus, it is in spiritual matters also. The young Christian may have a radiant faith, a sparkling zeal, and a tremendous desire to witness for God, but his accident rate is high. There is no easy way through these difficult years of Christian growth. The gymnasium of the faithful echoes with groans of exertion and reeks with the stench of human sweat. Beyond the horizon, however, is a crown that fadeth not away, and our exercise for godliness is not in vain.

“Extincto Nomene Christianorum”

These are the words which were placed over the ashes of the Holy Bible by order of Diocletian, the Emperor of Rome in 303 A.D. They indicate his belief that the Christian name had become extinct.

Diocletian had reason to believe that Christianity was doomed. He was the last in a long list of Roman Emperors who had used their powerful position to harass the cause of Christ.

Imperial persecutions were conducted in the reigns of: Nero 64 A.D.; Domitian 96 A.D.; Trajan 98-117 A.D.; Hadrain 117-138 A.D.; Antonius Pius 138-161 A.D.; Marcus Aurelius 161-180 A.D.; Septimus Severus 193-211A.D.; Maximin 235-238 A.D.; Decius 249-251 A.D.; Valerian 253-260 A.D.; Diocletian 284-305 A.D.!

During these difficult days it seems that there was little chance for the church to survive. Its leader had been publically condemned by both ecclesiastical and civil courts. His followers were predominantly from the poor and undeducated who were victims of discrimination at every level in society. They did not have any special buildings in which to meet and in the Capital of the Empire were even driven to the burial vaults beneath the city in order to find a place to worship God. They were given no consideration in the form of tax exemptions, religious holidays, or special days for rest and worship. To confess the name of Christ would immediately jeopardize their job, their family, and their very life. Literally thousands of Christians were burned at the stake or thrown to wild animals because they refused to renounce their faith in Jesus.

From this vantage point in history it is easy to see that Diocletian was wrong. As a matter of fact within nine short years of his audacious declaration about the extinction of the Chris-

tian name, Constantine was Emperor of Rome and had publically confessed the name of Christ. The symbol of the cross which had previously been an object of humiliation and shame was now worn proudly upon the shields of the Roman Soldiers. The Bible, which had previously been the object of ridicule and persecution, was now produced by Imperial Edict.

One of Constantine's first acts as Emperor was to order fifty Bibles to be prepared for the churches of Constantinople. Eusebius, the Bishop of Caesarea was commissioned with this task and the letter to him from the Emperor is as follows:

I have thought it expedient to instruct your Prudence to order fifty copies of the Sacred Scriptures, the provision and use of which you know to be most needful for the instruction of the church, to be written and prepared on parchment, in a legible manner and in a commodious and portable form, by transcribers, thoroughly practiced in their art. You have authority also, by virtue of this letter, to use two of the public carriages for their conveyance; by which arrangement, the copies, when fairly written, will most easily be forwarded for my personal inspection. One of the deacons of your church may be entrusted with this service, who, on his arrival here, shall experience my liberality. God preserve you, beloved brother.

In this book which Diocletian burned, and which is now the most widely circulated and sought after book in all the world, we find these words about the name of Jesus:

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:9-11).

Someday, even Roman Emperors will confess that name which they thought to make extinct.

Evidence

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1).

The physical world can be experienced by the exercise of our five senses. We can see, hear, taste, feel, and smell physical things.

There is, however, another world to be experienced which is not physical. Communication between the world of physical things, and the world of spiritual things is accomplished through the antenna of faith.

The Scriptures call faith the "substance" of things hoped for. The word translated "substance" is "hupostasis." It is a compound of two different Greek words, "hupo" meaning "under," and "statis" which means "a standing." It, therefore, refers to that which is foundational, or stands under. It is interesting to note that this very word is used in Hebrews 1:3 of the reality of God. The certainty of God is foundational to what we hope for.

But God is a Spirit. He is invisible to the human eye. No man hath seen God at any time. Therefore, we must contact God by means of faith. Faith involves that which we cannot see. "Seeing" is not "believing" for faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things NOT seen.

The word translated as "evidence" is "elenchos." Adam Clarke indicates that it refers to the conviction which is produced by the demonstration of a problem, after which demonstration there can remain no doubt. Aristotle used the word of mathematical demonstrations and defined it as ". . . that which cannot be otherwise than that which we assert." It is a word used by logicians to signify, "A demonstration of the certainty of a thing by sure arguments and indubitable reasons."

This is basically the word which is translated as "rebuked" in II Peter 2:16. Balaam had his eye on physical things. He "loved

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the wages of unrighteousness." The lure of these physical treasures almost proved fatal to him as an angel of God stood in his path with drawn sword. Balaam's ass had greater insight into the realities of life than did his master. Repeatedly he avoided the angel. Each time inflicting some momentary pain to the prophet. Oblivious to the reality around him Balaam began to beat his beast. At last the dumb ass began to speak and "rebuked" his master.

Faith is precisely this type of rebuke to an unbelieving world. It proves beyond the shadow of a doubt the reality of spiritual power. It is the logicians answer to the questions of humanity. It is the demonstration of certainty by evidence which rational men cannot dispute.

Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.

Faith Is Like Gold

Since our faith is compared by the Scriptures to gold, this quotation about gold may be both interesting and helpful.

“Gold is defined by chemists to be the most perfect, the most ductile, the most tenacious, and the most unchangeable of all metals. Its specific gravity is about 19.3. A cubic foot of pure gold, cast and not hammered, weighs 1348 pounds. In its native state, without mixture, it is yellow, and has no perceptible smell or taste. When exposed to the action of the fire it becomes red hot before it melts, but in melting suffers no alteration; but if a strong heat be applied while in fusion, it becomes of a beautiful green colour. The continual action of any furnace, howsoever long applied, has no effect on any of its properties. It has been kept in a state of fusion for several months in the furnace of a glass house, without suffering the smallest change. The electric and galvanic fluids inflame and convert it into a purple oxide, which is volatilized in the form of smoke. In the focus of a very powerful burning glass it becomes volatilized, and partially vitrified; so that we may say with the apostle, that though gold is tried by the fire – abides the action of all culinary fires, howsoever applied, yet it perisheth by the celestial fire and the solar influence; the rays of the sun collected in the focus of a powerful burning glass, and the application of the electric fluid destroy its colour, and alter and impair all its properties. This is but a late discovery; and previously to it a philosopher would have ridiculed St. Peter for saying, gold that perisheth

Gold is so very tenacious that a piece of it drawn into wire, one-tenth of an inch in diameter, will sustain a weight of 500 lbs. without breaking.

One grain of gold may be so extended, by its great malleability, as to be easily divided into two millions of parts; and a cubic inch of gold into nine thousand, five hundred and twenty-three

millions, eight hundred and nine thousand, five hundred and twenty three million, eight hundred and nine thousand, five hundred and twenty three parts: each of which may be distinctly seen by the naked eye!

A grain and a half of gold may be beaten into leaves of one inch square, which, if intersected by parallel lines, drawn at right angles to each other, and distant only the 100th part of an inch, will produce twenty five million of little squares, each of which may be distinctly seen without the help of glasses!

The surface of any given quantity of gold, according to Mr. Magellan, may be extended by the hammer 159,092 times!

Eighty books, or two thousand leaves, of what is called leaf gold, each leaf measuring 3.3 inches square, viz. each leaf containing 10.89 square inches, weigh less than 384 grains; each book, therefore, or twenty-five leaves, is equal to 272.25 inches, and weighs about 4.8 grains; so that each grain of gold will produce 56.718, or nearly fifty-seven square inches!

The thickness of the metal thus extended appears to be no more than the one 282.020th of an inch! One pound, or sixteen ounces of gold, would be sufficient to gild a silver wire, sufficient in length to encompass the whole terraqueous globe, or to extend 25,000 miles!

Notwithstanding this extreme degree of tenuity, or thinness, which some carry much higher, no pore can be discerned in it by the strongest magnifying powers; nor is it previous to the particles of light, nor can the most subtle fluids pass through it. Its ductility has never yet been carried to the uttermost pitch, and to human art and ingenuity is probably unlimited.

Gold was considered the heaviest of all metals till the year 1748, when the knowledge of platinum was brought to Europe by Don Antonio Ulloa: this, if it be a real metal, is the hardest and weightiest of all others. The specific gravity of gold is, as we have seen, 19.3; that of platinum is from 20.6 to 23: but gold will ever be the most valuable of all metals, not merely from its scarcity, but from its beautiful color and great ductility,

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by which it is applicable to so many uses, and its power of preserving its hue and polish without suffering the least tarnish or oxidation from the action of the air.”

—*Clarke's Commentary*, Vol. VI (I Peter 1:7).

Our Father

Someone has observed: "There is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come." The idea that God is "our Father" is more powerful than words can convey. Please consider its implications!

The Hebrew people did not conceive of God as their Father. They saw him "high and lifted up" and consequently quite distant and remote from their lives and needs.

Typical of the way they thought of God is this passage from Exodus 19:11-13:

. . . be ready against the third day: for the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon Mount Sinai. And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it; whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death. There shall not a hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live. . . ."

Because the Ten Commandments forbade taking the name of God in vain the pious Jew would not even attempt to pronounce the name of God for fear that he would not do so correctly.

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked: "teach us to pray," they were in for quite a surprise. Jesus said: "When you pray, say, Our Father . . ." This was a revolutionary concept. We have had fathers in the flesh with whom we felt quite comfortable, but before Jesus came, no one could feel comfortable in the presence of God. We have had earthly fathers whom we could approach with ease and confidence, but no one would dare to approach God this way before Jesus made it possible. Jesus said that if evil people like us know how to give good gifts unto our children, how much more would our "Heavenly

Father" give good things unto them that asked Him.

But Jesus even went a step further. He not only called God "Father," He called Him "Abba" (Mark 14:36). This is the word that is framed by the lips of infants. It is a term of endearment that betokens a beautiful relationship of access and trust.

The Scriptures promise the believer:

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father (Rom. 8:15).

And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father (Gal. 4:6).

Again I must focus attention on the dramatic difference between the Jew and the Christian. The Jew would not draw near to God or even attempt to pronounce His name, and the Christian enters boldly into the presence of God and cries out "Abba, Father."

There is nothing so powerful as an idea whose time has come. It may be that the time for this idea has come in your spiritual pilgrimage. If it has, then the words of Jesus will be of special significance to you as He tells us:

. . . Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to Him that knocketh it shall be opened (Luke 11:9-10).

The Fearful

Revelation 21:8 contains a catalogue of lifestyles which are incongruous with the Christian calling. They are: . . . the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars. . . ." All of which shall have their part in the lake of fire and brimstone.

There are three different Greek words which are all translated as "fearful." "*Eulabeia*" is used predominantly in a good sense as in Hebrews 5:7. "*Phobos*" is sometimes good and sometimes bad. "*Deilia*" (the word in our text) is always used in a bad sense. It denotes cowardice and timidity.

It is sobering to realize that "cowards" are seen by God in the same light as those who have committed crimes of great moral turpitude. To be timid and afraid is just as unchristian as to be an idolater or a sorcerer. For a Christian to lie or commit adultery he must do something contrary to his basic Christian character. The same is true with cowardice. It is diametrically opposed to the impulse of the Spirit in our lives.

Solomon once observed that "the wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion" (Prov. 28:1). The inward peace and stability of those who are right with God exudes itself in a very natural display of assurance. We are bold in our access to Jesus (Eph. 3:12). The "Holy of Holies" was off limits to every Jew in the world but one, but by the blood of Jesus every Christian can enter boldly even into the holiest place of all (Heb. 10:19). An audience with the King does not terrify the Christian for our King can be touched with the feeling of our infirmity; therefore, we come boldly unto His throne of grace (Heb. 4:16). The slave mentality cringes in the shadows, but the Holy Spirit enriches our lives with the assurance that we are sons, not slaves, and for this reason we can boldly cry out, "Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6). Jesus sent out His disciples without

purse or script, and with no weapon to protect themselves, and yet He expected them to behave like children of the King. Their lives were not to be obsessed with worry about their daily provisions, and they were not to be intimidated though they were sent out like sheep in the midst of wolves. Little flowers never worry and neither should we, not even in the face of death.

The word for "fearful" in our text is found only a few times in the scriptures. It is a strong and abrasive word reserved for occasions of special rebuke. It is noteworthy that Jesus used this word when His disciples panicked during a storm. He said in essence, "Why are ye cowards, O ye of little faith (Matt. 8:26, Mark 4:40). Their attitude in such circumstances would directly affect their work as apostles.

The conversion of John Wesley is linked with a similar event. While crossing the Atlantic with their ship beset by storm, he was obsessed by the calmness of Christians who refused to be intimidated by the prospects of death. In a similar manner the demeanor of the apostles would be a strong influence in their evangelistic efforts. Those who heard them perceived their boldness and took knowledge that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13). Even when threatened they prayed for more boldness (Acts 4:29), and the answer to this prayer gave "great power" to the witness of the apostles. Men like Stephen are not afraid to live or die, and their faces can shine like an angel's when surrounded by mortal enemies (Acts 6:15). This very experience may partially explain the "goad" which was a constant irritation to the memory of Saul of Tarsus and helped to lead him from torturing others to submitting himself to torture for the cause of Christ. It might also have been in his mind when he wrote:

And do not (for a moment) be frightened or intimidated in anything by your opponents and adversaries, for such (constancy and fearlessness) will be a clear sign (proof and seal) to them of (their impending) destruction; but (a sure token and evidence) of

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your deliverance and salvation . . . " (Phil. 1:28, Amplified N.T.).

But the fearful shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone. . . .

The Fool

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God (Psa. 14:1).

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia lists eight different Hebrew words which are all translated as “fool.” They are:

1. Nabal – shamelessly immoral
2. Ewil – hasty, impatient, self-sufficient
3. Kesil – thickness, sluggishness
4. Sakhal – thickheaded
5. Pethi – simple
6. Baar – brutish
7. Taphel – insipid, untempered
8. Toholah – folly, error

It is interesting that “nabal” is used by the Psalmist to describe the man with no concept of God. The word also occurs in Isaiah 32:6 where the Scriptures provide us with an apt definition or description of the “nabal.” In the King James version “nabal” is here translated as “vile person.” “For the *vile person* will speak villainy, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice hypocrisy, and to utter error against the Lord, to make empty the soul of the hungry, and he will cause the drink of the thirsty to fail.”

Students of the Bible will recognize “Nabal” also as the husband of Abigail. She described him as a “man of Belial” and then remarked, “For as his name is, so is he; Nabal is his name and folly is with him . . .” (I Sam. 25:25).

Now let us note again the 14th Psalm. “The fool hath said in his heart there is no God. *They are corrupt, they have done abominable works. . . .*”

The fool herein described may not be an “atheist” in the

generally accepted usage of the term. It might well be someone who is a professing Christian, but anyone who is "shamelessly immoral" is without any real concept of God. Every departure from the moral standards of the Christian life reflects a spiritual deficiency, but the "man of Belial" described in our text is openly immoral.

The word is used in Genesis 34:7 to describe Shechem who raped Dinah, the daughter of Jacob and Leah. Shechem was not ashamed of his vile conduct but boldly pursued his intentions to take Dinah for his wife. The word is used in Deuteronomy 22:21 to describe that woman who would "play the whore in her father's house." It is used in Joshua 7:15 to describe Achan who stole garments and money from Jericho. It is used in Judges 19:23-24 to describe the sexual perverts who lusted after a Levite and abused his concubine to death. It is used in II Samuel 13:12 to describe the immoral conduct of Amnon with Tamar, the sister of Absalom.

Every one of these despicable crimes against God bears symptoms of the same fatal infirmity. This kind of person cannot possibly have a correct view of Jehovah. Regardless of their songs, prayers, and affirmations of faith, they are saying "in their heart" that it doesn't matter.

I know of a preacher who has embezzled money and abandoned his wife for another women. I know of other church leaders who have trampled holiness for personal gain or pleasure. Our churches are replete with renegades who had their fingers crossed at the marriage altar and who swap off their mates with little or no regard for divine justice. They say in their heart that there is no God. They may be professing Christians but they are practicing atheism. Their brazen rejection of truth betrays their deepest conviction. No matter what they say, they still expect to get by with it. In their heart there is no God. Mike Pratt once put it like this: "If living men knew what dead men know, the world would be saved in less than one hour."

Forbearing One Another In Love

In Ephesians 4 we find a series of practical admonitions regarding Christian unity. In particular I would like to call your attention to the Biblical command "forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).

Our English word "forbear" is a translation of the Greek word "Anecho." "Ana" means "up," and "echo" means to "hold." We are to "hold up" one another in love.

The Christian Church has spiritual roots which cause this verse to come alive with meaning. Nearly 200 years ago our fathers in the faith were involved in uniting believers from a variety of denominational backgrounds. Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and others determined to be "Christians Only." They certainly did not claim to be the only Christians, but they did make a determined effort to avoid a sectarian spirit and be Christians only. They used no book but the Bible, they had no creed but Christ, and they used no name but the divine.

After years of discussion a certain amount of "forbearance" was needed in order for unity to become a reality. Walter Scott described some of the struggles experienced in 1827: "There are three parties struggling to restore original Christianity: the first of them, calling themselves "the Churches of Christ," the second calling themselves "Christians," and the third lying at that time chiefly in the bosom of the regular Baptist Churches and originating with the writings and labors of Brother A. Campbell. . . ."

The "Churches of Christ" had spiritual roots reaching back to the Haldanes and the Scotch Baptist churches of Scotland and England. The "Christians" were associated with B.W. Stone of the Presbyterian Church and the Rice Haggard and James O'Kelly revolt in Methodism. The Baptist reformers

out of those influenced by the writing and teaching of Thomas and Alexander Campbell.

Some of these believers were coldly intellectual, unemotional, and formal. Others of them believed in "fire" evangelism and were revivalistic. B.W. Stone thought A. Campbell was wrong about the Holy Spirit, and Campbell thought Stone was weak on the divinity of Christ. Stone thought the name "Christian" was given by divine authority and ought to be the distinctive title of every follower of Christ, but Campbell preferred "disciple" as a more humble designation and felt it was of earlier and more frequent use in Scripture. Some felt the need of structure and others preferred the free flow of the Spirit.

In such a context it would be easy to tear down one another, or as Paul wrote to the Galatians, to "bite and devour" one another. Christian unity, however, is not an option for the believer. It is an explicit command from Christ. In order to achieve this unity we must, among other things, "forbear one another in love." We need to "hold up" those with whom we differ instead of tearing them down.

The body of Christ is not one member, but many. Each member of the Body has his own spiritual gift and his own unique contribution to make to the work of God. We need those who are "coldly intellectual" and also those whose emotions are sensitive to both laughter and tears. We need those who feel the need for structure and also those who prefer to remain unencumbered by programs and restrictions of men. Those parts of the Body which seem to be unimportant to us may turn out to be the most important of all. When any member of the Body ceases to function at full capacity, the Body of Christ is handicapped.

It is not necessary to agree with someone in order to "forbear" with them. As a matter of fact it seems that forbearance is most appropriate for those with whom we do not agree. We can hold them up, however, instead of holding them down. We can build them up instead of tearing them down. When we

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“forbear one another in love” we are helping to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

The Form of God

The versatile Greek language has a variety of words which are all translated by the English word "form."

Morphosis	a form, outline, or outward semblance
Tupos	a form pattern or mould
Eidos	an appearance or external form (form eidon - to see
Hupotuposis	an outline, sketch, pattern or form

In Philippians 2:6, however, when the Scriptures teach that Jesus was in the "form of God" the inspired writer used the Greek word "morphe" to describe that reality.

Thayer states that "morphe" comes from a root which means "to lay hold of" or "seize."

W.E. Vine quotes Gifford in what he describes as an excellent definition of the word; "morphe is therefore properly the nature or essence, not in the abstract, but as actually subsisting in the individual, and retained as long as the individual itself exists. . . ."

The Dictionary of N.T. Theology concurs, "the change of morphe involves the change of essential character. . . ."

The word "morphe" is found but three times in the N.T. Scriptures.

Jesus existed in the "form" of God (Phil. 2:6).

Jesus took upon himself the "form" of a servant (Phil. 2:7).

Jesus appeared in another "form" to two of his disciples (Mark 16:12).

The first two references are easy for me to understand. Jesus was not superficially God - He was God in essence to the very core of His being. Nor was He merely a servant or slave in external appearance. His very nature compelled Him to serve others. I feel comfortable with such thoughts.

I'm not certain, however, just how to understand that Jesus

appeared to two of His disciples in another "morphe."

Some might suggest that the last verses of Mark's gospel are not inspired because they are not found in some of our best manuscripts. I do not feel comfortable resorting to this position.

The idea that Christ could assume another form should not surprise us. On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus is said to have taken on another form. The Bible word used to describe this is "metamorphoo." The first part of the word "meta" implies change, and the latter part of the word is from "morphe." A metamorphosis is a change of form. The caterpillar becomes a butterfly. It is in reality the same being, but with a change of form (Matt. 17:2 and Mark 9:2).

Saul of Tarsus gained spiritual insight into this mystery when he encountered the risen Christ on the Damascus Road and heard the words, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4).

Saul would later be "transformed" into Paul the Apostle who would write, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me . . ." (Galatians 2:20).

The identity of Christ with Paul was so closely related that Paul spoke of "becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10). The Greek word used here is "symmorphizomenos." *The Dictionary of N.T. Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 707 remarks on this verse that it is not that Paul would become like Jesus in the sense that both were martyrs: "Rather the apostle in his suffering sees the death of Christ becoming a reality in his own death. The death of Christ acquires a 'morphe' in the death of the apostle. The death of Jesus is not simply an historical datum of the past for Paul. It is a present event. . . ."

While I do not profess to understand this mystery of godliness I mention it with the prayerful hope that it will help us to be sensitive and kind in our treatment of all people . . . perhaps that stranger is Christ in another "form" and will someday say "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me . . ." (Matt. 25:40).

Misunderstanding and Grace

A preacher friend became excited about the grace of God. His enthusiasm led him to preach and write upon this subject. Some of the "raised eyebrows" in the area belonged to his fellow preachers, and one of them took him aside for a little fatherly advice.

"The way you teach grace," he said, "can be turned into license." He seemed to indicate that such a course of action was too dangerous for a loyal gospel preacher. My friend responded with this question: "Could anyone ever take your teaching about grace and turn it into license?" "Absolutely not," came the firm reply. "Then you're not teaching grace," he said, "in the same way that Paul did."

Someone has observed that the truth of God is like light, and every time we seek to protect light we produce darkness. How aptly this is illustrated by our approach to the subject of grace. We have become so obsessed with the many perversions and corruptions of grace that when we teach on the subject, it comes out with so many shadows that it is depressing and negative. To simply read a passage on grace without apologies is to create a fear that we have been corrupted by some Baptist doctrine.

This very experience happened to me in a revival meeting some years ago. I had simply read Ephesians 2:8-10. As innocuous as this might seem it was enough to trigger a friendly warning from one of the local elders.

There is an old joke about the little boy who asked his daddy if the cows were Christians. "Why do you ask?" said his father. "Well . . . they all have long face," came his sincere reply.

Christianity is supposed to be a relationship which creates "joy unspeakable and full of glory." The Ship of Zion should leave a multitude of happy, singing people in its wake. There should be no propensity to gloom in the Christian cause, and

those who smile should not be under suspicion. Our sins are washed away, and we abide in a blessed state. We have a High Priest and Advocate who ministers continually in our behalf. We are united with a power that is able to accomplish exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. We are in fellowship with a Spirit that intercedes for us in the presence of God with groanings which cannot be uttered. It's time to take off the brakes and sing our way into new realms of glory.

Admittedly, there are some dangers in such a course of action. Some will turn the grace of God into lasciviousness (Jude 4). Others will slanderously say, "Let us do evil that good may come" (Rom. 3:8). Still others will insist that we continue in sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1). All of which should not deter us from the positive proclamation of the happy news that man is saved by grace.

Without grace we all are doomed. With law, or without law, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Even if the only standard which God used to judge us was our own concept of right and wrong, we would still be condemned. But our God whose judgments are unsearchable and whose ways past finding out has revealed a mystery that was inconceivable to man and even beyond angelic eyes to comprehend.

We are saved by grace, through faith. it is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.

Hallelujah!

Grasshoppers

“ . . . and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers . . . ”
(Numbers 13:33).

Ron Key pointed out to me something which is now quite obvious. Everybody knew there were giants in the land, but only the faithless spies considered themselves as “grasshoppers.”

Their major problem was, therefore, not something external, but something internal.

The twelve spies searched out the land and came back with their report. Everybody had the same information about what they saw, but not everybody had the perspective on the way they saw themselves.

The faithless viewed themselves with an incredible distortion. “ . . . and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers. . . . ” What a pitiful self-image.

I remember many years ago listening to Philippine General named Romulo lecture on Campus in Hays, Kansas. He was a close friend of Douglas MacArthur and even waded ashore with him when he made his famous return to Leyte. Someone asked the diminutive little General how he felt being in company with all those American Generals who were over six feet tall. He responded with a twinkle in his eye, “like a dime among nickels.”

But the Hebrews saw themselves as only “grasshoppers.” In their own eyes they were inadequate and deficient that they assigned to themselves a sub-human status. Before they saw the giants they were regular people. After they saw the giants they began to shrivel up into something utterly insignificant in their own eyes. The giants remained the same size, the walled cities remained the same size, the size of the grapes, and figs and pomegranates remained constant, and even the spies themselves remain the same size. The only variable was not in reality, but in perspective. Therefore, in their own eyes . . . they became as mere grasshoppers.

As we rethink this Biblical story it is well to remember that God does not like negative reports. Usually these negative reports tell more about us than they do about the reality we are trying to describe.

Caleb and Joshua are the only two spies whose names have become a hallmark in history. The Bible mentions the names of Shamua, and Shaphat, and Igal, and Palti, and Gaddiel, and Gaddi, and Ammiel, and Sethur, and Nabbi, and Geuel. These were the names of the men who saw themselves as grasshoppers. Since they considered themselves as unimportant, history has considered them the same way.

Can you give me the name of Walt Disney's brother? probably not. He was the man who kept telling Walt Disney that it couldn't be done.

We don't need any more grasshoppers in the church reminding us of our inadequacies. We need a generation of soul winners with the mentality of giant killers. We need people who can stand with the ragged apostles on Olivet and dream of world conquest. The power behind us is always greater than the task before us.

We need to be reminded that we are "more than conquerors" through Him that loved us. We need to give thanks to God "which always causeth us to triumph in Christ" (II Cor. 2:14). We ought to cry out with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me . . ." (Phil. 4:13).

The faithless spies not only died and went to a faithless grave, they even took an entire generation of people whom they influenced to be as faithless as they were. In the wake of their negativism and defeat God raised up a new generation who were led by Caleb and Joshua to a victory which could have been theirs.

Today, as we search out the lost world around us it is important that we see ourselves, not as grasshoppers, but as laborers together with God. In His power we remain eternally "more than conquerors."

“Hedonism”

Our English word “hedonism” comes from the Greek word “hedone” which means “pleasure.” It comes from the same root “hedys” which means “sweet pleasing, or pleasant.” Originally, it meant something pleasant to taste.

The word is used only five times in the N.T. Scriptures and each time it has a bad connotation.

It is used in Luke 8:14 of the pleasures of this life which choke out the Word of God so that it does not produce good fruit in our lives.

It is used in Titus 3:3 to describe the selfish life style which Christians experienced before conversion.

It is used twice in James 4 (see verses 1 and 3) to explain the way that lust for pleasure precipitates conflict in the human race.

Finally, it is found in II Peter 2:13 amidst a long catalog of conducts which are incongruous with the Christian life.

S.I. McMillen offers some critical insight into the hedonistic philosophy in his excellent book, *None Of These Diseases*.

He tells of a young minister who gave up the pulpit to become a medical doctor. When asked why, he replied, “I took up the practice of medicine because I discovered that people will pay more money to care for their bodies than for their souls.”

Some years later the young man gave up the practice of medicine to become an attorney. When asked why he replied: “I took up the practice of law because I discovered that people will pay more money to get their own way than for either body or soul.”

On the surface, hedonism, seems to be a rather benign and harmless vice. In reality it is so utterly antagonistic to Christianity that it is perhaps the root cause of virtually every other problem faced by humanity.

Christianity involves the denial of self. Unless we are willing to take up a cross and die we cannot be his disciples.

Once we die to self, a marvelous transformation begins to take place. Like a grain of wheat that surrenders to the earth we become the recipients of a brand new kind of life. We are delivered from suffering to a place of royalty. Following in His steps we soar to new heights and transcend the difficulties and troubles which beset and hound those who are locked into the world of mere time. Our cross is exchanged for a crown and we reign with Jesus.

Hedonism seeks to circumvent the selflessness of suffering. It is a grain of wheat that refuses to die. It stalks through Eden with the philosophy of no restraint. It licks its lips in the presence of forbidden fruit and defies the Great Lawgiver with laws of its own. It is the embodiment of self worship which inevitably results in moral decay. It tramples over everyone and everything in its climb toward a happiness which is always too elusive to hold for very long. After a moment of pleasure it slips from our grip to taunt us into another mad scramble or irrational fling.

True happiness is not a product to be sought after as much as it is a by-product to be received.

The Savior of the World said it like this: "Whoever exalts himself will be abased but whoever humbles himself shall be exalted."

The Road To Heresy

(Galatians 5:19-21)

“. . . Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresie!”

1. *Hatred*. Also translated as “enmities.” It is the Greek word *εχθρα*. It is defined by Thayer (p. 265) as “enmity.” It is used in the Bible of:

the enmity between Pilate and Herod (Luke 23:12).

The enmity between Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:14-16)

See also James 4:4 and Romans 8:7

Vine states, “It is the opposite of *αγαπη* love.”

NOTE: *The Road to Heresy Begins with a Lack of Love.*

2. *Variance*. Also translated as “strife.” It is the Greek word *ερις*:

It is defined by Thayer (p. 249) as “contention, strife, wrangling.” It is translated as “debates” in II Corinthians 12:20.

The word is also found in: I Corinthians 1:11; 3:3; Titus 3:9; Romans 1:29; 13:13; Philippians 1:15; I Timothy 6:4.

NOTE: *Step 2 on the Road to Heresy is Contention, Debate, Wrangling.*

3. *Emulations*. Also translated as “jealousies.” It is the Greek word *ζηλος*. It is defined by Thayer (p. 271) in two ways: (1) It is used in a good sense of “zeal, ardor in embracing, pursuing, defending anything.” II Corinthians 7:7, 11; 9:2, etc. All zeal is not good, however. The word also is used in a bad sense: (2) “An envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy.” See Romans 13:13; I Corinthians 3:3; James 3:14; Acts 5:17; 13:45; II Corinthians 12:20. The JEALOUS are sometimes very ZEALOUS.

NOTE: *After a Wrangle or Debate you will almost always find “an envious and contentious rivalry.”*

4. *Wrath*. It is the Greek word θυμος. It is defined by Thayer (p. 293) as "Passion, angry heat, anger – forthwith boiling up and soon subsiding again." Thayer further states that this word emphasizes a "sudden burst of anger" as opposed to the word οργη which means "indignation which arises gradually." It is found in Colossians 3:8; Romans 2:8; II Corinthians 12:20, etc. It also means "GLOW, ARDOR." Revelation 14:8, 10; 18:3, etc.

NOTE: After a wrangle, and after people become zealous in their contention, you will ordinarily find someone "blowing up" in a "glowing passionate burst of anger."

5. *Strife*. Also translated as "factions." It is the Greek word επιθεια. It is a very picturesque word which is used only 8 times in the New Testament. Aristotle used the word to represent those "who electioneer for office, courting popular applause by trickery and low arts." It comes from the verb επιθος which means "working for hire, a hireling." Thayer (p. 249) says that the word is used in the New Testament as "a courting distinction, a desire to put one's self forward, a partisan and factious spirit which does not disdain low arts." It is used in II Corinthians 12:20; Philippians 1:16, 17; 2:3; Romans 2:8; James 3:14, 16.

NOTE: After someone has blown up in a church brawl, when they cool down they will often begin a low and dirty campaign to further their selfish aims.

6. *Seditious*. Also translated "divisions." It is the Greek word διχοστασια. It is defined by Thayer (p. 153) "to stand apart," "dissension, division." Paul said "Mark them which causes DIVISIONS . . . and avoid them" (Romans 16:17). It is used only three times in the New Testament. Other usage is I Corinthians 3:3.

NOTE: Once someone has begun to politic and electioneer, divisions soon appear!

7. *Heresies*. It is the Greek word *αιρεσις*. It is only used 9 times in the New Testament. Thayer (p. 16) says that the word comes from *αιρεομαι* and means "choosing, choice" or "that which is chosen; a chosen course of thought and action." It then applies to those who separate from others because of this choice.

Of the nine times the word "heresy" appears in the Bible it is never found in the gospels. It is used only by Luke, Paul and Peter. It is used six times in Acts.

- Acts 5:17 "... which is the *sect* of the Sadducees. . ."
- 15:5 "... certain of the *sect* of the Pharisees which believed . . ."
- 24:5 "... ringleader of the *sect* of the Nazarenes . . . "
- 24:14 "... after the way which they called *heresy* (a *sect*) so worship I . . . "
- 26:5 "... after the most straitest *sect* of our religion I lived a Pharisee."
- 28:22 "... concerning this *sect* we know that it is everywhere spoken against."

It is used twice by Paul:

Galatians 5:20 "... strife, seditions, heresies . . ."

I Corinthians 11:19 "... for there must be also heresies among you that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. . ."

It is used once by Peter:

II Peter 2:1 "... even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily (secretly, craftily) shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them. . ."

The Sadducees were a sect or "heresy" simply because they chose to separate from the rest of their Jewish brethren. The reason why they separated does not hereenter the picture. The

Pharisees composed a sect or "heresy" for identically the same reason. Inasmuch as the Christian separated themselves from the Jews they also, in the strictest sense of the word, formed a sect (or heresy).

Alexander Campbell has thus observed:

As the word sect or heresy, found only in the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles, does always in the former simply mean a party, without any regard to its tenets, the term has nothing in it either reproachful or honorable. Hence it is equally applied to Pharisees, Sadducees, Nazarenes or Christians, without any insinuation as to the character of the party. *In the Christian Epistles it is, however, used in a bad sense, and is always connected with censure*" (emphasis mine, B.M.)

He continues in another place:

Christians, contradistinguished from Jews, Mussulmans, Pagans, Infidels, are lawfully, righteously, and innocently a sect, a heresy: but a sect among these is corrupt, treasonable, and most reprehensible, according to every precept, doctrine, and saying of the New Institution. Thus a man may be a Christian or of the sect of the Nazarenes, but not a Lutheran, a Calvinist, and Arminian, without blame.

Note this comparison between II Corinthians 12:20 and Galatians 5:20:

II Corinthians 12:20

Galatians 5:20

Debates	Same word	Hatred
Envyings	Same word	Variance
Wraths	Same word	Emulations
Strifes	Same word	Wrath
Backbiting	(evil speaking)	Strife
Whisperings	(secret slandering)	Seditious
Swellings	(Puffing up of soul, loftiness, pride)	Heresy

Tumults (instability, a state of disorder, confusion. It refers to the type of commotions that are often associated with war, Luke 21:9)

John 17:20 ff:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 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. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them: that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. . . .

Holiness

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

Whatever "holiness" is, it is essential to salvation for the Scriptures teach that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. It is therefore both wise and expedient to pursue the study of this word that we might be permitted to "see the Lord."

The words holy, hallow, hallowed, holiness, consecrate, saint, sanctify, and sanctification all come from the same root word. No one word can be adequately treated without reference to the others.

Someone has observed, "It is not only necessary to speak where the scriptures speak, but it is also necessary to speak as the scriptures speak." In other words we must use Bible words to mean what they did in Bible times. Today the word "saint" is frequently used to refer to a dead person who has been canonized by the Roman Catholic Church. Needless to say, such a concept is completely foreign to the word of God. Many people will readily admit that they do not know just what a saint is, but they feel pretty sure they have never met one.

Actually the scriptures teach that every Christian is "sanctified" and is thereby properly designated as a "saints." Paul wrote to the "saints" at Rome (Rom. 1:7), Corinth (I Cor. 1:2), Ephesus (Eph. 1:1), Philippi (Phil. 1:1), Colosse (Col. 1:2) etc. These people were human beings who were capable of making mistakes yet they were referred to in the language of heaven as "saints."

The word translated "holiness" in Hebrews 12:14 is also translated as "sanctification." It simply means to be "set apart" or "consecrated." In the strictest sense of the word one could even be sanctified, or set apart to paganism. For example, the

word translated "harlot" in Genesis 38:21 comes from the Hebrew word "khashash" which literally means "the sanctified, or consecrated one." In pagan cultures, female slaves were frequently "set apart" or "sanctified" to the service of their immoral gods.

Note these Bible usages of the word "sanctify."

1. A day was sanctified - (Gen. 2:3). It was set apart to God.
2. The first-born was sanctified (Exod. 13:1-2). Both man and beast were to be set apart to God. They could not be used for man's selfish purposes.
3. A mountain (Exod. 19:23). This mountain was not to be used by man (v. 13).
4. An altar (Exod. 40:10).
5. Vessels (Exod. 40:9).
6. The Tabernacle (Exod. 29:44).
7. Holy things (I Chron. 23:13) etc.

Most important, however, is the fact that men are to be "sanctified." We are to be separated from the world and dedicated to God. We are not our own, we are bought with a price. We are sanctified by:

1. God (Jude 1).
2. By the offering of the body of Christ (Heb. 10:10).
3. By Christ's blood (Heb. 10:29; 13:12).
4. By the washing of water by the word (Eph. 5:26).

The Scriptures teach that we are (I Cor. 6:11).

1. Washed (Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:16, John 3:5, Acts 2:38).
2. Sanctified (Eph. 5:26, II Tim. 2:19-21, etc).
3. Justified (Rom. 3:24, 5:1, 8:33 etc.).

The question to you is this! *Are you set apart to God?* If you are not, you will not see the Lord.

Imitators of God

Man was originally created in the image and likeness of God. Genesis 1: makes a fourfold emphasis in telling the story. "Image . . . likeness . . . image . . . image." The fact that man was to be like God is difficult to overlook. The "fall" of man is equally obvious. The whole of creation became subject to decay and up to this very moment is groaning and traveling in pain waiting to be delivered from corruption.

The essence of the Gospel is to redeem man for his fallen state and restore him to the likeness of God. This is accomplished, with the help of the Holy Spirit, by means of "imitation." The Scriptures are explicit: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself for us . . . (Eph. 5:1, NIV).

The Greek word translated as "imitators" is "mimetes" from which we get our English word "mimic" or "mime" and it is always used in a good sense in the Scriptures. Almost everything which we learn in life we learn by imitation. Evil examples corrupt good morals, but good examples form the very foundation of the Christian system.

Jesus said: "verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son and showeth Him all things that He himself doeth . . ." (John 5:19-20). There is a sense in which Jesus, who was God, still "imitated" God.

The Disciples were to have the same relationship with Jesus that He had with the Father. Jesus said: ". . . As my Father hath sent me, even so send I you . . ." (John 15:9). "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one . . ." (John 17:22).

The Disciples continued the cycle. Paul wrote: "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1).

IMITATORS OF GOD

Michael Griffiths in his book *The Example of Jesus* offers this poignant insight:

It is possible to be overfamiliar with great truths: but this really is an absolutely devastating one, a totally mindboggling concept that takes the breath away. We scruffy, frail mortals, whose hair and teeth fall out, who look in our mirrors to see the lines, creases and blotches marking our inevitable progress towards senility and decay; we empty, shallow, morally bankrupt people, totally impoverished in spirit, self-doubting, "non events," are to be remade in a godlike mould, into the image of Christ, glowing with glory and divine vitality. It is a glorious doctrine which is rarely presented to nonChristians: if it were made more of in evangelism people would begin to see what God is doing for people in the world he has created, and come stampeding into the Christian family. "Eternal life" seems a relatively feeble concept by comparison, even though it is saying the same thing in other, less contemporary words (page 35).

The Biblical admonition to be imitators of God is cast in the context of the family. We are to imitate God like children. The newborn infant is a very poor representation of his father. With no teeth and little or no hair it is hard to believe that an 8lb. youngster will ever be six feet tall. As he continues to grow, however, the likeness becomes more apparent. Because the young man is the product of his father's "seed" . . . he will grow up to be like his father.

The believer is "born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever" (I Pet. 1:23). We have a power over sin which the unconverted do not have because we are begotten of God and possess his "seed" within us (I John 3:6).

Let us, therefore, be "imitators of God as dearly loved children. . . ."

Incredible?

"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8).

If I could raise the dead . . . that would be incredible!

If you could raise the dead . . . that would be incredible!

If medical science could raise the dead . . . that would be incredible!

But why should it be incredible that God could raise the dead? God is all powerful all knowing, and everywhere existent (*omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent*) . . . what would keep Him from raising the dead? If God can speak the universe into reality, control and contain the power of the atom, and bring new life to a rotten potato – what is so all fired unbelievable about the resurrection?

The universe in which we live is infinitely large. We have absolutely no idea how many billions of stars or systems of stars are scattered throughout the heavens and we lack the mental acumen to even talk intelligently about "infinity" . . . and still we worry about the resurrection.

The tiny planet on which we live is spinning on it's axis at a thousand miles an hour and whirling in it's orbit about the sun at 16,000 miles per hour . . . we are not even aware of any movement at all . . . yet, we sit up nights wondering if it is possible for God to bring our loved ones back to life.

Our little earth contains a million mysteries which mystify your most brilliant scholars and astonish the students in virtually every sphere of scientific investigation . . . yet, we stand slack-jawed and incredulous when someone talks about a resurrection.

We believe that God can turn a caterpillar into a butterfly, an acorn into an oak tree and a microscopic sperm into an olympic athlete – why couldn't He also raise the dead?

INCREDIBLE?

The resurrection of the dead is not incredible at all. It is, in fact, in perfect harmony with the power and personality of our Creator. It is the very kind of manifestation that we have come to expect from Him. It is the one sign to which he constantly directed a doubting world.

God is sympathetic to our nature. He is deeply touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows our frame and He remembers that we are dust. In every age, therefore, he has patiently granted abundant evidence to authenticate and conform His revelation to man. He turned the rod of Moses into a serpent and manipulated like magic the flesh of a leprous hand. Moses was convinced (Exod. 4:1-9). He promised fifteen years of life to the dying Hezekiah and granted assurance of this pledge by the shadow on the sundial moving backward ten degrees (II Kings 20:8-11). Hezekiah was convinced. He gave to Gideon the tests of the food, the fleece, and the enemy's dream (Judges 6:17-24, 36-40; 7:9-15). Gideon was convinced.

The age in which we live is characterized by doubt and insecurity. Thousands turn on with mind expanding drugs while others tune out with the merciless machinery of suicide. While the world totters on the brink of a nuclear volcano, God incarnate offers to mankind a single sign. He focused the world's attention to a solitary miracle which would either make or break the influence of His life. He said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." An evil and adulterous generation sought after a sign, but no sign was granted save the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was delivered from the power of the sea monster even so the Son of Man would triumph over the grave. Never in Christian history have informed and rational men been able to evade or avoid the witness of the empty tomb. The fact of His resurrection triumphed over the frustration and doubt of His disciples, the scrutiny of the Jewish Sanhedrin, the scourge of Roman persecution, the indifference of the dark ages, the rationalism of the renaissance, and even now stands like a Gibraltar in the midst of a crashing sea of doubt.

WORDS ARE WINDOWS

The essence of the Christian gospel is “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”

What’s so incredible about that?