

Ingratitude

There is a sense in which "ingratitude" is involved in almost every sin. Adam and Eve were not thankful for the myriad of blessings which they enjoyed in Eden . . . they wanted more. They did not appreciate the Tree of Life and the environment of serenity and peace . . . they wanted more. They overlooked their perfect health, their flawless food, and the warmth and protection from storms and discomfort . . . they wanted more. Their dissatisfaction and ingratitude was exploited by the wicked one to the ruination of the human race.

Achan was not thankful for his daily bread and their signal victory over Jericho . . . he wanted more. Saul was not content with the thousands of acres and countless vineyards he already had . . . he wanted more. This dearth and dissatisfaction of soul is the breeding ground of a million woes. it spawns the sins that wreck and ruin our lives and bring havoc to a nation. The thankless heart is the lever that pries open a Pandora's box of heartaches and trouble.

The thankful man is hard to tempt. He is happy where he is and with what he has. His life is characterized by joy and gratitude. Thankfulness and ingratitude are never affected by the state of events . . . only be the state of mind. These words reflect not where we are, but what we are. Adam and Eve were not happy in Paradise . . . the apostle Paul was happy in prison. Saul, David, and Solomon were sovereigns over a mighty Kingdom. Human words are strained to describe the majesty and magnificence of their wealth and splendor . . . yet this in no way guaranteed their gratitude. Thankfulness is a state of mind . . . not a state of events. The widow with her mites can be more thankful than the king with his millions. Thanksgiving can warm the fires of a shanty and make it seem like a palace. Ingratitude can frost over a palace and make it seem like a shanty.

Probably no nation in human history has ever enjoyed more physical blessings than our own. Yet alas, we roam the thermostatically controlled comfort of our Eden in search of forbidden fruit. The Pilgrims could smile at the sunrise and sing merrily as they labored throughout the long day. Their crude clothing could not dampen the fires of joy that welled up within them. Their simple food was received with abundant joy and Thanksgiving was their way of life. There seemed to be no way to smother the happiness of that little band. The hardship, toil, sickness, privation and death which they experienced only fanned the flames of appreciation and magnified the blessings which did come their way. The Pilgrim eye sees beyond the sickness and the cemetery, the Pilgrim heart clings in love to the memory of a single joy and to the expectation of a better tomorrow.

How sad indeed the angels must be as they behold us strut and fret our time upon the stage and then pass on into the wings of eternity. We stand bewildered and perplexed as the spotlight is turned our way. We have missed our cues and forgotten our lines. In our confusion we are not even aware of the embarrassment we produce. The theme of the drama is all but lost as we ramble on in a greedy search for amusements and selfish pleasures. Ever receiving but never satisfied we live a thankless life and die a thankless death.

Oh, for a change of heart that would bring Revival to a nation of ungratefals. Oh, for the philosophy of Paul and the Pilgrims that would enable us to be content, regardless of our circumstances. Oh, for a rebirth of old fashioned gratitude that would bolt the door on sin, let in the sunlight of God's blessings and transform our dreary Christians into singing soldiers of the cross.

"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

Insight

But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping; and as she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain (John 20:11-12).

Insight is an essential ingredient to the process of learning. What we observe is not nearly as significant as the meaning which we are able to derive from those observations.

My aunt once observed a little red light on the dash of her automobile. She did not, however, make a correct association with the significance of that light. Consequently she continued to drive the car with no oil pressure and ruined the engine.

A specialist can get real excited by glancing at a heart monitor or reading numbers on a patient's chart. The same information would be all but meaningless to me.

It is a fact that Jesus died and rose again. Most Americans and many people throughout the world concede these facts with little or no argument. The meaning which we associate with these facts, however, is the crucial question. It divides the world into "saved" and "lost" and determines a destiny in "heaven" or "hell."

It is also a fact that after his resurrection Mary visited His tomb and found two angels sitting where His body had lain. One of the angels was at the head and the other at the foot.

John wrote with great economy of words. The last words of His gospel indicate that even the world itself would not contain the whole story. All that is written, therefore, in the 21 brief chapters of John's gospel is extremely significant.

The reference to Mary's observation of the angels is utterly profound. It may have been a turning point in the life of John himself as he was just coming to grips with the reality of the resurrection and the atoning death of Jesus for the sins of the

world. If you can come to the same understanding or "insight" it can bring about your eternal salvation.

The Hebrew mind had been trained to think of forgiveness in association with the Ark of the Covenant. The ark was covered by a golden slab called the "mercy seat" with angelic beings called "cherubim" at either end. It was here that God promised to meet in communion with man. It was here that the High Priest sprinkled blood on the Day of Atonement.

The Hebrew word for atonement is "kaphar" which means "to cover" and was associated with the golden covering called the "mercy seat." The law was covered by mercy. This enabled sinful man to meet and commune with God.

Years later John would write:

My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world . . . (I John 2:1-2).

The Greek word for "propitiation" is "hilasmos" and corresponds to the Hebrew "Kippurim" or "atonement."

Jesus is our "propitiation" - our "covering" - our "atonement." It is in the person of Jesus that we meet and commune with God. One cannot help but wonder if His precious blood might not have soaked through His grave clothes and stained the slab between the two angels which Mary saw.

The fact that God so loved us is used to argue that we should also love one another.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another (I John 4:10-11).

The Joy of the Lord

The Babylonian Captivity ended in 536 B.C. when Zerubbabel came back to Jerusalem with 42,360 Jews (Ezra 2:64). Ezra also informs us that there were 7,337 servants, 200 singer, 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, 6720 asses, and 5,400 gold and silver vessels which had been taken from Jerusalem.

Ezra himself returned to Jerusalem in 457 B.C. with 1,754 men, 100 talents of gold and 750 talents of silver.

By the time that Nehemiah arrived in 444 B.C. almost 100 years had gone by and still the walls of Jerusalem lay in shambles. It is incredible, and almost miraculous to discover that under his leadership those walls were rebuilt in only fifty-two days (Neh. 8:10).

For generations these people had been beaten down and oppressed. Seventy long years of captivity in Babylon had given to them a slave mentality. Though they had now been free for almost one hundred years they still had not escaped the stigma of failure and oppression.

Then one day a dream was born in the mind of a man who was cup bearer to the King. Through the power of God he was emboldened to ask the King for help and assistance. In his mind the dream began to become reality. As he journeyed around the city of Jerusalem one night a plan emerged which would turn those shambles into a citadel of strength. His optimism was contagious. Soon the men who had loitered about so long were busy in God's business.

Naturally there was criticism. There always is when people have a mind to work. The enemies of God began to laugh in scorn and derision. The Jews had been so passive and so feeble for so long there seemed to be some substance to their skepticism. Tobiah the Ammonite taunted them by saying that even a fox could break down their stone wall if he tried to walk upon it.

These prophets of doom, however, had underestimated the determination of the people for "the people had a mind to work." Around the clock they maintained a constant vigil. Without even pausing to change their clothing they labored with half of them holding spears from the rising of the sun until the stars appeared at night. Undaunted by danger and unintimidated by threats, the walls took shape and the tide of battle was reversed. Nehemiah 6:16 reports that the heathen were cast down in their own eyes. Or as the NIV has translated it, "our enemies lost their self-confidence."

THE JOY OF THE LORD had triumphed. A positive mental attitude had prevailed. An inspired group of people had accomplished more in 52 days than their ancestors had accomplished in 52 years.

In a new age of pessimism and discouragement it is exciting to believe that THE JOY OF THE LORD can still be our strength.

The Kiss

Judas Iscariot gave a sign to those men who would arrest Jesus. "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he. . . ." Therefore when Judas came to Jesus in Gethsemane he said: "Hail, master, and kissed him . . ." (Matt. 26:48-49).

It is both interesting and significant that two different Greek words are used in this passage to mean "kiss."

The first is the normal word for "kiss" which is "philesen." It was a customary greeting in Bible times much as a handshake is today.

The second word used is "kataphilesen" which means to "kiss fervently." The word "kata" in front of "philesen" strengthens and intensifies it. Thayer states that it means "to kiss much, kiss again and again, kiss tenderly. . . ."

The word is used but six times in the New Testament Scriptures. Twice it is used with reference to Judas kissing Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:49 and Mark 14:45).

It is used twice in the story of Jesus visiting the house of Simon the Pharisee. A woman of the streets fervently kissed his feet (Luke 7:38). Jesus distinguished her love from the absence of Simon's love by saying to him: "Thou gavest me no kiss (philema) but this woman since I came in hath not ceased to kiss (kataphilousa) my feet . . ." (Luke 7:45).

It is used of the Father of the prodigal son who fell on his neck and "kissed" him (Luke 15:20). This, no doubt, was much more than a casual greeting.

Finally, it is used of Paul's tearful goodbye to the elders of the church in Ephesus. When they heard that they would see his face no more they "wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him . . ." (Acts 20:37).

Students of the Scriptures know that Judas did kiss Jesus fervently when he betrayed Him . . . but we are not sure why.

It is possible that Judas did so in the ultimate manifestation

of hypocrisy.

It is also possible that Judas really did love Jesus in his own twisted way. Some think that the whole scheme was calculated to precipitate an armed rebellion against Rome and force Jesus into the role of an earthly King. When this did not happen Judas returned the money and went out and hanged himself (Matt. 27:3-5).

In either instance Judas was a sinner who called Jesus Lord . . . but would not submit to do His will. He wanted to be a follower . . . as long as it did not conflict with his predetermined plans. He could sing loud and pray long and put on a passionate display of his affection for Jesus . . . but the bottom line adds up to rebellion. Jesus prayed to God saying: "Not my will but thine be done. . . ." Judas could never quite pray that with sincerity.

Passion for God which is not coupled with submission is a common malady in our modern world. It is nothing new. It is much like the sin of Judas who betrayed His Sovereign Lord with a "kiss."

Saved by His Life

Romans 5:10

The Scriptures teach that Christ loved us when we were unlovely. Romans 3:13-16 presents this rather gross description of mankind:

. . . their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways. . . .”

Yet he loved us! He died for us when we were “*without strength*,” “*ungodly*” and “*yet sinners*” (Rom. 5:6-8). The Scriptures then affirm that if He was willing to do all of this for us while we were enemies, certainly He will be willing to do even more for us now that we are His friends. When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son . . . but ***NOW THAT WE ARE RECONCILED WE SHALL BE SAVED BY HIS LIFE.***

The ancient Hebrew people worshipped God with a tremendous handicap. In order to obtain forgiveness for their sins it was imperative that they journey to the tabernacle (or temple) and solicit the help of a priest to make atonement for them (Lev. 6:1-7 for example). Naturally, there were many sins committed in ignorance and these sins too required special sacrifices and the service of a priest (Lev. 4:2, 5:17; Numbers 15:24, etc.). The Day of Atonement was perhaps the highlight of the Hebrew religious experience. It was on this day that the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies with blood which he offered for himself and for the errors of the people. Upon other occasions the worshippers of God may have doubted their relationship to Him . . . but on this day . . . while the priest was ministering . . . they knew that they were right with God. “For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to

cleanse you, that ye may be clean from ALL your sins before the Lord" (Lev. 16:30).

This "blessed assurance" which was experienced only upon occasion during the days of Moses, can be ours 365 days a year.

By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament and they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: **BUT THIS MAN, BECAUSE HE CONTINUETH EVER, HATH AN UNCHANGEABLE PRIESTHOOD.** Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, **SEEING HE EVER LIVETH TO MAKE INTERCESSION FOR THEM** (Heb. 7:22-25).

We are not only saved by the death of Christ . . . we are also saved by His life. He ever liveth to make intercession for us. He is our advocate at the right hand of God (I John 2:1-3). Christ has not entered into Holy Places made with hands, which are figures of the true; but into Heaven itself, **NOW TO APPEAR IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD FOR US** (Heb. 9:24). This ministry is not once a week . . . or once a year . . . for the Lord sware and will not repent that Jesus is a priest **FOREVER** after the order of Melchizedek (Heb. 7:21).

His continuing and unchangeable priesthood means that there is **NO** condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). The fact that He is our advocate with the Father means that His followers are a "glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). Because He is the propitiation for our sins we have confidence that we are "holy, and unblamable, and unreprouvable in His sight" (Col. 1:22). Because He ever liveth to make intercession for us we believe that we shall be presented **FAULTLESS** before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy (Jude 24).

Certainly we sin. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (I John 1:8). But those who

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abide in Jesus know that these sins will not be imputed, or charged, to us (Rom. 4:8). Our great High Priest does not slumber nor sleep. The blessed Holy Spirit intercedes continually in our behalf with groanings which cannot be uttered.

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Rom. 5:10).

Note! The Day of Atonement is still celebrated by modern Jews. It is called "Yom Kippur."

Love in the Book of Acts

The word "love" occurs some 175 times in the N.T. Scriptures. In addition, there are numerous references to "loved," "lovest," "loveth," etc. The concept of love was to be the hallmark of the Christian movement. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Paul wrote to Timothy, "the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart;" that is, the reason why God gave commandments was to produce love. The summation of everything God expects can be stated in two simple commands – loving God in the right way and loving our neighbor in the right way. John stated it succinctly when he said, . . . "This is the message that we have heard from the beginning that we should love one another. . . ."

With this background it came as somewhat of a shock to me when I discovered that the word "love" does not occur one time in the book of Acts. It is found frequently in the gospels reflecting both the life of Jesus and His teaching. It is often in the epistles as a guide to Christian living and the ultimate aim of the Godly life. But the word "love" does not occur one time in the book of Acts.

I am tempted to be more specific and state that the word "love" is not found in the book of Acts in any form. That would be true if you are thinking merely of human words like "love," "loved," "lovest," etc., but it would not be true if you are thinking of love personified in the lives of the redeemed. In this latter respect the book of Acts is replete with references to love. True love will always express itself in action. The man who merely says, "Lord, Lord," but does not obey, in reality does not love. Jesus put it like this, "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments" (John 14:23). "He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" (John 14:24, etc.). John, the apostle of love, expressed it like this: "But whoso hath of this world's goods and seeth his

brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and truth . . ." (I John 3:17-18).

I conclude, therefore, that the book of Acts speaks of love in its highest form, not merely in word but in actions. When I see the early Christians so obsessed with one another that not one of them looked upon any of the things which he possessed as his own, I must conclude that love is not absent from the book of Acts by any means. It is there in a language far more eloquent and intelligible than sounds in the air or marks upon a page. We would rather see a sermon than hear one any day. Love is much more apparent in the lives of believers who talk about Jesus and share with one another than it is among those who claim to "share with Jesus" while talking about one another. We would rather see a sermon than hear one any day. In this regard the sacred history of Acts literally comes alive with love.

What prompted the apostles to abandon their homes and their occupations to go forth like "sheep in the midst of wolves?" What profound emotion was responsible for the self denial and evangelistic zeal for the Jerusalem church? What was the impetus for world evangelism and for bridging the barriers of hostility which divided mankind? If Jesus had never said one word about love, Calvary would have proved his affection for the world, for "hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us." In a similar fashion "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16).

How would Luke write about us if he should suddenly return to chronicle a 20th century version of Christianity in action? Would he say, "I was hungry . . . and you prayed for me when you thanked God for your meals. I was thirsty and you sang, 'Shall we gather at the river.' I was a stranger and you sent me to the Salvation Army. I was naked and you let me rummage through your rags. I was sick and you hired a minister to make

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hospital calls. I was in prison and you stayed home to watch TV. I was lost, but you resented an emphasis on missions. I was in trouble, and you referred my problems to a committee.”

My apologies to Robert Burns as I paraphrase his famous poem:

O would some gift the Giver give us
to see ourselves as Jesus sees us
It would from many a blunder save us
and many a foolish notion!

Love and Power

Dr. Anthony Campolo points out the inverse relationship between love and power. Some have called this the principle of least interest. When two people have a relationship the one who loves the least has the greatest power. The man who would just "do anything" to keep his marriage together is in a position to be controlled by his wife . . . and vice versa.

The person who loves becomes vulnerable. If you should love more than you are loved, you by virtue of that fact are exposed emotionally, and even physically.

Frederick Nietzsche believed that the drive for power was man's dominant motivation. That which Freud attributed to sex, Nietzsche attributed to power. Even in cases of rape, sex is now considered to be of secondary importance. Psychologists now believe that the rapist may be primarily driven by the desire to dominate.

God is all powerful, but the Scriptures affirm that His basic nature is described by love. Over and over the Scriptures remind us that God is love.

Since love and power are inversely related this placed the Christ in a position to be abused and controlled by men. No man took His life, He gave it. Hereby perceive we the love of God because He laid down His life for us. . . . He so loved the world that He gave, and in the giving of Himself He became vulnerable.

Since God loves us more than we love Him we are in a position to treat Him almost any way we want to. We can go to church if and when we want to; pray if and when we want to; give if and when we want to; and study the Bible if and when we want to. When our Lover stands at the door and knocks we can turn up the TV and shout obscenities through the keyhole if we want to. Today we are in positions of power . . . because we do not love.

C.S. Lewis offers this critical insight into the way we are exposed by love:

To love at all is to be vulnerable, love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure to keep it completely and perfectly intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round about with hobbies and little luxuries, avoid all entanglements, lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. it will not be broken, but something far worse, it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, unredeemable. . . .

The tragedy of the unredeemed heart is not only realized by a diminished life of misery upon earth, but an eternity of misery hereafter. Soon the age of grace will come to a conclusion and the Lord Jesus will return from heaven. In flaming fire he will take vengeance upon them that know not God and obey not the gospel. They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (II Thess. 1:7-9). Someday every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2:11).

Today the relationship of love and power is such that God manifests the love and we manifest the power. Someday this will be reversed. Sinful man will not be permitted to forever thumb his nose at God and trample under foot the blood of His precious Son.

There will be a payday someday!

Until that day we have the choice of love or power . . . God help us to choose love.

The Magnification of Christ

. . . According to my earnest expectation and my hope, That in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death (Phil. 1:20).

The concept of magnification is quite simple, but it offers to us profound spiritual implications.

If you were to hold a magnifying glass over this paper, the paper would remain constant, but your perception of it would change. Magnification does not alter the object, only our perception of it.

In this regard it is immediately obvious that Christ was not changed at all because Paul "magnified" Him. As a matter of fact Jesus is the only real constant that there is in the entire universe. He is without variation or shadow cast by turning. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our perception of Him, however, changes.

Sometimes God seems very far away. Sometimes it is difficult to see that He really cares for us individually and personally. In such a state we frequently grow disheartened and discouraged. Our depression feeds upon itself until a vicious cycle is created which robs us of happiness and joy.

Then along comes someone like Paul who specializes in the "magnification of Christ." All of a sudden we see things about Jesus which we had never seen before. Through the lens of a dedicated life we discover that He is nearer than we had ever dreamed. We discover to our wonder and amazement that it is not necessary to go into Heaven and bring Christ down, or to go down into the deep and bring Christ up. As a matter of fact we find that Christ is everywhere and that when we believe in our hearts and confess with our lips we find salvation.

Jonah certainly had a distant and distorted view of God. He was naive enough to believe that if he could only make it to

Tarshish He would be outside the pale of God's jurisdiction. Someone has observed that sometimes you can see further through a tear than you can through a telescope. At any rate Jonah saw more of God from the belly of that great sea monster than he had ever seen before in his life.

Isn't it exciting to believe that the way we live . . . or the way we die . . . can magnify the Christ. Everyone of us know people who are invariably an inspiration to us. To merely be in their presence is to feel that God is near. Their confidence is so contagious that we find it easier to pray, easier to witness, easier to live and easier to die because of the insights which their lives make possible.

This is the kind of a person that we can be! We can become the lens through which the beauty of Christ is seen by those around us. We can cry out with Mary . . . "My soul doth magnify the Lord. . . ."

The song writer expressed it beautifully with these words:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me
All His wonderful passion and purity
Oh, my Savior divine. All me being refine
"Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

Mansions

A little child once asked me if there would be toys in heaven. After pondering that question for some time I answered "yes." I certainly did not want to misrepresent eternity to that little child . . . and admittedly I did not have book, chapter, and verse for my answer. Yet, I think the answer conveyed the right concept.

Heaven is far more wonderful than the finite mind is capable of comprehending. To a little child happiness is not represented by golden streets and gates of pearl, but by toys. Therefore, I think it is legitimate for little children to think of heaven as a place full of wonderful toys.

The transition from this world to the next may be much like our transition from our mother's womb. It was painful but certainly worth all the pain. If an unborn child could reason he would probably have some grave concerns about happiness outside of the womb. How would he eat? How would he stay warm? What would he do, etc.? By comparison . . . there is no comparison. The joys of life are literally without number and the painful process of being born gave us access to them all.

Those of us who are more mature do not think of heaven as a place of toys, but rather a place where we will have a "mansion." Our thinking is based on a passage of Scripture in John 14:2, ". . . In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you. . . ."

Thus, we have come to think about mansions to live throughout all eternity. We even sing "I've got a manison, just over the hill top" and other similar songs.

It is with considerable reluctance that I explore this verse in greater detail. Heaven is far more wonderful than the finite mind can conceive and if the thought of a mansion makes you happy I see nothing wrong with it.

A closer look at the verse, however, leads me to question this imagery. On the very surface, whatever these mansions

are, they are in our "Father's house." Mansions in a house is not the way we usually think of mansions.

Actually, the English word "mansions" is only found one time in all the Bible. It is a translation of the Greek word "mone." Interestingly enough, this word only occurs twice in the Bible, and both instances are in John 14.

The other usage is in John 14:23, "Jesus answered and said unto 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."

The word "mone" is not easy to define. Thayer defines it as "a staying, abiding, dwelling, abode." But we are led to ask, "What kind of dwelling?"

The *Dictionary of N.T. Theology* suggests that it means an "inn" or a place of halt on a journey and they quote Origen who felt that the word in John 14 meant "stations on the road to God."

F. Hauck takes John 14:2 to refer to our movement from below, up to God and said, "The word seems to be deliberately chosen to express the fact that our earthly state is transitory and provisional. . . ." He then states that John 14:23 "depicts salvation after the departure of the Savior as a permanent abiding of Christ and God in believers."

The Latin "mansio" and the old English "mansion" referred merely to a dwelling as opposed to a large sumptuous house.

The meaning of the passage, therefore, seems to be this. The apostles were already deeply concerned about their future . . . and they would even be more troubled when Jesus was crucified.

At this juncture Jesus reassures them and pleads with them not to worry. God would always have provisions for them. They would never be turned away from His shelter.

As a matter of fact Jesus was going away to prepare a place for them. he intended that where He was they would be also.

Now the question is this, "If God is willing to prepare a place

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for us, are we willing to prepare a place for Him? He wants to dwell in our hearts. he lovingly knocks at the door and pleads for us to open that door and invite Him in.

Judas, not Iscariot, asked Jesus "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?" (John 14:22).

The answer involved the loving of Christ and the keeping of His words. When we do this, God will come and make his "abode" or "dwelling" in our hearts. He will care for us, and we will care for Him. Then it will no longer be I that live, but Christ that lives in me.

God has a place for you, but do you have a place for Him?

“Nehustan”

The word “nehustan” is found but one time in the Bible (II Kings 18:4). It refers to something which is made of brass or copper and is the name which good King Hezekiah gave to the serpent which Moses made in the wilderness. The story behind “nehustan” is both interesting and profitable. As a matter of fact the Scriptures teach that the things which happened unto the nation of Israel were recorded for our admonition and instruction (I Cor. 10:6, 11).

When the nation of Israel journeyed in the wilderness they became discouraged and began to complain against God and also against Moses. Because of this the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people so that many in Israel died. When the people repented of their sinful attitude, God instructed Moses to make a serpent of brass and to put it upon a pole. Everyone who looked upon this brazen serpent would live.

Over seven hundred years had gone by since Moses had made the brazen serpent and yet it still existed in the days of Hezekiah. As a matter of fact the people had even come to worship it.

Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, was a wicked king who encouraged the people in idolatry. He even burned little children in the fire after the abominations of the heathen (II Chron. 28:3). The kingdom was corrupt and disorganized and was forced to pay a heavy tribute to Assyria.

When Hezekiah came to power there was need for a tremendous reform. He was only twenty-five years of age but with great courage he removed the high places and brake the images and cast down the groves. He was obliterating anything that was associated with idolatry. The extent of his reform is indicated by the fact that he would even dare to destroy the sacred serpent which had been constructed by Moses those many centuries before. He called it “nehustan” or pieces of

"NEHUSTAN"

brass. That sounded almost blasphemous. The people had carried that serpent throughout the remainder of their long journey to Canaan and carefully preserved it throughout the many centuries since that time. In their spiritual poverty, however, they had lost their perspective. They worshipped all sorts of idols and had even made an idol out of this serpent. God never intended it to be that. The serpent of brass was merely a thing. It was a tool to be used at one specific time and for one specific purpose. The people, however, came to worship the serpent and to neglect the God who commanded its construction. Hezekiah, the great reformer, knew better. He called it "nehustan" or "pieces of brass."

We, too, live in a time when great reform is needed. As in the days of Hezekiah many have lost their perspective and worship relics and traditions which God used in days gone by but which have no meaning or relevance today. We need men with the courage of Hezekiah who can call them "nehustan."

Never, Never, Never, Never, Never

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee (Heb. 13:5)

The versatile Greek language had more than one way of saying "no." Perhaps the strongest word was the simple denial "ou." Dana and Mantey observe in their Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, "It is clear-cut, point-blank, negative, objective, final."

As strong as the word is, however, it can still be strengthened or intensified by using it with "me" which also means "no." Thus, "ou me" is a double negative which means "no, not by any means."

The above Scripture is interesting because it contains this double negative two times and sandwiched in between is "oude" which means "neither, nor, or not even."

Thus, Matthew Henry paraphrases the promise as "I will never, no never leave thee, nor ever forsake thee" and correctly observes, "Here are no less than five negatives heaped together, to confirm the promise; the true believer shall have the gracious presence of God with him in life, at death, and forever."

This is the promise which I have childishly rendered as affirming that God will never, never, never, never, never forsake us."

When I think of this promise my mind inevitably goes back through the years to a hospital scene where I saw this Bible verse literally come alive with meaning. My sister in Christ, Grace Ogden, was nearing the end of her sojourn upon this earth. She was too weak to visit and I sensed also that she may have been too near death to concentrate upon a lengthy passage of Scripture. Therefore, I elected to read but this single

verse. "Let your conversation, or your manner of life, be without covetousness and be content with such things as ye have." Always a family reflecting contentment with their modest means, it seemed superfluous to tarry long upon that thought. Before I could continue, however she smiled and completed the verse herself. "For He hath said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.' "

Her voice was weak but filled with conviction. In a short while she was gone. yet, gentle reader, we have every confidence that she was not compelled to make that journey alone. To the very end she claimed the blessed promise of Jesus who had bankrupted the Greek language to convey the certainty of His presence.

In this world of flux and change it is refreshing to discover such an unchanging Gibraltar of truth. Whatever the shifting tides of fortune may bring your way, the Christian can claim the certainty that our blessed Jesus will never, never, never, never, never leave us or forsake us.

On Oversight

When I was a student in college, longer ago than I care to admit, we had a chapel speaker who insisted that every missionary ought to be under the oversight of an eldership. His text upon that occasion was Acts 13. He pointed out that Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the church at Antioch and that they reported back to that church upon the completion of their journey.

This seemed to me to provide a Biblical and a practical "check and balance." I was already aware of the painful fact that some missionaries had betrayed the trust of their supporting churches and the thought that oversight by the elders was "Scriptural" made the matter beyond the jurisdiction of human judgment.

Thus, I became a zealous proponent of this concept and was pleased to hear of certain missionaries who never made a major decision without a prayerful consultation with their supporting elders. I know of one missionary who has been on the field for more than twenty years who still cannot even return to the States to attend a missionary convention without the permission of his elders. The fact that he had been extremely successful as a missionary and that his supporting church had shriveled up and almost died was beside the point. I even participated in this kind of "oversight" by acting as a part-time liaison between a missionary in South American and an eldership here in the Midwest. Whatever problems we encountered in such an arrangement were considered as merely a "part of the territory" for when something is "Scriptural" it is obviously too sacred to tamper with.

Several years ago I determined to set forth in order some of these things which are most surely believed among us . . . and to prove them by the Scriptures. The Antioch example seemed like a good place to start and I expected to use this example to

prove the Biblical validity of missionaries serving under the "oversight" of elders.

Permit me to confess that the more closely I examined the Scriptures the more my preconceptions tended to vanish like a vapor. As a matter of fact, I could not even prove that the church in Antioch of Syria had elders. Furthermore, I came to conclude that my understanding of the relationship of Barnabas and Saul to the church at Antioch was 180 degrees off course.

A turning point – a turning point in my own study came with reference to the Greek word which is translated as "recommended" in Acts 14:26 and 15:40 (King James Version).

I noted that Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch from which they had been "recommended" to the grace of God (Acts 14:26).

I also noted that when Paul and Barnabas had a sharp disagreement Paul chose Silas and departed being "recommended" by the brethren unto the grace of God.

I was curious to know what the Bible meant by "recommended" for it might provide insight into the relationship between these men and the Antioch church.

The Greek word translated as "recommended" is *paradidomi* which literally means to "give over" in this regard.

The word to me seems incredibly strong and must have created a special sensation in the minds of people in the first century. Luke used it in Acts to refer to the "delivering up" of Jesus to be crucified (3:13); the "delivering" of Christians to prison (8:3; 22:4); the "delivering" of Paul to the Gentiles and imprisonment (21:11); and of Paul's subsequent "deliverance" to a Roman Prison (28:17).

The meaning of the word is quite obvious. For example, when Pilate "gave over" Jesus it meant that he was relinquishing whatever control he may have had to someone else. He even dramatized this by publicly washing his hands.

When Saul of Tarsus "gave over or "delivered" prisoners, it

meant the same thing. He turned his prisoners over to someone else. They could do with these prisoners as they wished while he went out and rounded up some more.

As incredible as it might seem, this is the very word which the Holy Spirit used to describe the relationship between the church at Antioch and their missionaries. Barnabas and Saul were not given over to prison and death, but with the same dramatic sense of finality they were given over to the grace of God. Whatever control the church may have had over these men in the past was now being relinquished. The future was no longer in their hands but in the hands of their Creator and thus, they were "recommended" by the brethren unto the grace of God.

Rivers and fountainheads— I used to say "a church can no more rise above its leaders than a river can rise above its fountainhead." Yet, it was obvious to me that Saul of Tarsus advanced beyond any of the leaders in the church at Antioch. He labored more abundantly than any of the apostles and was used of God to write more books of the Bible than any other inspired man. I am convinced that such a dramatic development would not have been possible if Paul had been under the "control" of the church at Antioch.

It is also erroneous to assume that leaders in a church are its source of spiritual life. They may be channels through which the "River of Life" passes, but the fountainhead of that river is Jesus Christ. He is the Author and Perfecter of our faith and those who are "given over" to Him have access to the ultimate in "oversight."

Every parent ought to have the dream that their children will do better than they did. Quite frequently this does occur, but it can only happen when the parents are wise enough to permit their children at some point to be liberated from their control. A father who is completely illiterate can have a son graduate from college . . . if he will only let him. It is a frightening thing

to see your children go away to college. There are many dangers associated with such a risk. There is a certain sense of security which we feel when our children are dutifully at home responding to our personal instructions.

Church leaders may feel the same sense of security and well being when they are in absolute control of everything which goes on. That may be the way it is done in many congregations, but that is not the way it was done at Antioch.

The church at Antioch did not try to control Barnabas and Saul. They took their hands off of these men and turned them over to the grace of God. They recognized their own limitations and recommended them to the care of the ultimate teacher and guide. They believed that God was perfectly capable of delivering the godly out of temptation and of reserving the unjust unto punishment. The benefits involved in such a risk far outweighed the dangers, and the Christian world should be eternally grateful that Paul was not controlled by anyone but the Holy Spirit.

The track record – Whatever they did in the first century certainly seemed to work. In a matter of only ten short years Paul had fully preached the gospel from Jerusalem round about unto Illyricum and was excited about the possibility of preaching also in Rome and Spain (Rom. 15:19 ff).

When he needed helpers God guided him to men like Timothy and Luke. In the absence of human help God sent an angel to his side to bring him comfort during those dark and difficult days of storm and shipwreck.

Certainly there are dangers associated in granting such freedom to a fallible human being. He may betray the Lord like Judas did. He might love this present world to such an extent that he would depart like Demas. He may even make shipwreck of the faith like Hymenaeus and Alexander.

Based upon the information given to us in the Holy Bible, however, it seems that the confidence which the church at Antioch placed upon Barnabas, Saul and Silas was well found-

ed. We have every reason to believe that these men remained faithful unto death and have now received the crown of life.

Shall we dare? – It may be that some of you have had experiences similar to my own. Perhaps you too have made the mistake of equating “oversight” with “control.” Perhaps you have in all good conscience felt an obligation to try to control some church, or missionary, or Christian worker.

Now we have injected into the picture additional information upon which you might feel constrained to “reflect” just as I have, perhaps the Christian workers with whom you are associated need to be trusted more than they need to be controlled. Perhaps God is better able to orchestrate their work and ministry than any human board or committee. Perhaps the crying need of the hour is for these workers to be handed over to Jesus with no strings attached.

The Good Shepherd has had a lot of experience with sheep of every description. When His sheep hear His voice and follow His leading they will dare the incredible and do the impossible. They do not need to be “conformed” by outward pressure and human manipulation, they need to “transformed” by the power of His Spirit within.

There are some who may betray this trust, but I am convinced that they are few and far between. The crying need of the hour is not to protect the cause of Christ by burying His workers in bureaucracy, but by turning them loose on the cutting edge of life.

The beautiful trust which Paul received he passed on to others. When he left his beloved brethren from Ephesus he gave to them this beautiful benediction.

“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” (Acts 20:32).

God help us to do the same.

The Pain of God

Pain is a phenomenon beyond the ability of the human mind to classify and comprehend accurately.

A glass of water contains millions of microscopic life forms, but it is doubtful that they know pain. Hal Hudson said recently in Moberly, MO that he had even witnessed ocean crabs devouring one another with no apparent awareness of discomfort. Such lower forms of life display no emotion and little or no reaction to painful stimuli.

All pain is not physical. The higher we ascend in the scale of creation the more we become aware of emotional affliction which compounds the problems of physical pain. Virtually everyone has observed the distress of a bird or a beast bereft of her young. With the flutter of her wings or the wail of her voice she communicates a measure of concern that is indiscernible in creatures that are inferior.

But now let us pursue our climb from these lower forms of life to man. There is little doubt that the higher the form of life the greater is the capacity to experience pain. Thus in man we find the turmoil of the spirit mingled with the agony of the mind and the torment of the body. In man is the capacity to weep with a profusion which it is impossible for inferior animals to experience or understand.

But now let us carry this analysis of pain to its ultimate conclusion. If a bird can feel the loss of her missing young or cry out from the pain of a wounded wing; if man can write a tear stained letter, know the agony of a troubled conscience, and scream at the piercing of a sword; how much greater must be the capacity of God to experience the phenomenon of pain.

Though such a subject transcends the ability of the finite mind to comprehend adequately, we can catch a glimpse of God's pain personified in Jesus. We see Him weeping like a little child when he gazed upon a city that it was too late to save.

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He saw beyond the moment of prosperity to the time when Jerusalem would be covered with ashes and wet with human blood. Not one stone would be left upon another that would not be cast down. The agony of that hour is utterly beyond our comprehension.

Nor can we totally appreciate his tears at the tomb of Lazarus or the crimson sweat drops of Gethsemane. We can love our wives and children, but our devotion to them will forever be inferior to the manifestation of His perfect love at Calvary. So when we mourn their loss and weep in loneliness at the decoration of their graves, we only share a trifling intimation of the heartbreak which can be experienced by the infinite mind of God.

Isaiah said it like this:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts . . . (Isaiah 55:8-9)

The song writer put it in these words:

None of the ransomed ever knew how deep were the waters crossed. Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through ere He found the sheep that was lost.

Oh, God, forgive us our trespasses which have caused you pain greater than we are capable of understanding.

The Persecutor

It has now been 30 years since I began the study of the Greek language. I never considered myself a good student of Greek and am actually embarrassed about how little I remember from my classroom days.

Somehow, however, the word for "persecute" comes to my mind with remarkable clarity. It is the word "dioko" and the definition which I memorized from my grammar book was "I follow after, pursue, persecute."

The *Dictionary of N.T. Theology* associates it with the Homeric "diemai" which means literally "to chase, pursue, run after, drive away, and fig. to pursue something zealously. . . ."

The definition is quite appropriate for Saul of Tarsus who persecuted those which were of the Way. He was not content to sit idly at home, he persecuted the Christians. He hounded their steps. He had letters of authority to go as far away as Damascus. He followed after, he pursued, he persecuted.

Then, a remarkable thing happened to Paul. He stopped persecuting people. he experienced a dramatic "conversion." His whole approach to life was turned inside out.

The Greek word "dioko" is translated as "follow" a number of times in the Scriptures. Now Paul began to "follow after and pursue" those things which make for peace (Rom. 14:19). This he did with the same energy and enthusiasm which he had once displayed in following after and pursuing Christians.

Paul also followed after love (I Cor. 14:1); that which is good (I Thess. 5:15); righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (I Tim. 6:11), righteousness, faith, love, peace (II Tim. 2:22), and sanctification (Heb. 12:24), etc.

It seems to me that there is a dramatic difference between following after people, and following after righteousness and peace.

I recall a number of experiences from my early ministry

when it seemed to me that I was all but playing God. When I found others in what I determined was doctrinal error I took it upon myself to set them straight. If and when they did not respond in what I perceived as an appropriate way I was inclined to dog their steps until they did.

Jude 9 played an important part in helping me to change my mind. This verse pictures Michael the archangel contending with the devil about the body of Moses. The dispute was ended, however, when Michael simply said, "The Lord rebuke thee." Vengeance belongs to God. It was not Michael's responsibility to dog the steps of the devil until he changed his mind.

This verse has come to my mind literally hundreds of times as I meet many different individuals with whom I differ on various points of Christian doctrine. I need not assume the role of the persecutor. I need not harass them and compel them to change. Conversion comes from within and not without. Even Saul of Tarsus was not transformed by argument.

Debate are described in Scripture as "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19 ff). There is a point in perpetual argument which infects us with the virus of our own righteousness. Once convinced that we are right we are tempted to mount a crusade to convince everybody that we are. With this mentality we are more apt to pursue people than peace.

Paul was a peacemaker. He followed after it with all of the determination and zeal that once caused him to mount a house-to-house crusade against the church. Peace with God and peace with his fellow believers became the star by which he steered. He went to bed with it at night and awakened with it in the morning.

Let us follow in the steps of the old persecutor himself and be transformed from persecution of people to the pursuing of peace.

Preparing a Place

Jesus promised that He was going to prepare a place for His disciples (John 14:2). The Greek word used to describe this place is "mone." It is used but two times in all the Bible. In John 14:2 it is translated in the KJV as "mansions" and in John 14:23 as "abode."

In the first Scripture Jesus is going to prepare a place for us, and in the second we need to prepare a place for Him. He and the Father want to come and make this "abode" with us.

Before proceeding any further it is important to note that God thinks differently than man. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so the thoughts of God transcend the thought patterns of the finite mind. For this reason the preparation of a place for God will be much different than it would be for a human being.

Let us suppose that a missionary is in your area and is planning to stay at your home. As you prepare a place for him you will probably try to make the best impression possible. You may want to pick up some of the clutter that inevitably accumulates around the house and stash it in the closet. Sweeping and dusting would also be customary, and you may want to put fresh linen on the bed where your guest will sleep. Usually we will try to put our best foot forward and convey the impression that we are really nice, neat and responsible people. There will probably be no loud arguments or embarrassing behavior during his stay, and we may be tempted to breathe a sigh of relief when he is gone.

Let me categorically and emphatically say that this is NOT the way to prepare a place for God.

God wants to dwell in a humble and contrite heart. The Hebrew word for "contrite" is "dakka" and comes from a root which means to "crumble" or be "crushed." When you prepare a place for God it is exactly the reverse of the way you prepare

a place for man. God wants to be invited into a heart that is crushed and broken.

Jesus spoke of two men who went up into the temple to pray. One of them was proud that he fasted and gave tithes, the other was so ashamed of his sin that he would not even lift his eyes to heaven. It was the sinner with whom the Lord chose to dwell. God resists the proud but gives grace unto the humble.

God is "omniscient." He sees everything and He knows everything. It is offensive to Him for us to sweep something under the rug, or attempt to hide the clutter of our lives behind the veneer of a closet door. Conversely, He is honored when we love Him so much and trust Him so explicitly that we smash down every barrier and are totally exposed in His presence.

"The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit" (Psa. 34:18).

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart" (Psa. 51:17).

Isaiah 57:15 reminds us that God dwells in the heavens, but also with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit.

The same contrast is found again in Isaiah 66:1-2. God made the heavens, and He dwells there. How ridiculous it is for us to attempt to create a dwelling place for God with our human ingenuity and cleverness. God is not looking for someone to rival His ability and "impress" Him with the beauty of their handiwork. He said, ". . . but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

It strains our credulity to believe that God actually wants to be invited in to the debris and rubble of a broken life, but this is exactly what the Scriptures teach. To believe otherwise is to be deceived!

Behold, even now He is standing and knocking at the door of your heart. Why not "prepare" a place for Him, and invite Him in. Knock down and destroy every vestige of pride and

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self-sufficiency, crush every barrier to His free access to your life, and permit every facade of human achievement to crumble in the presence of His glorious perfection.

God wants to dwell in a broken and a contrite heart!

Pleasures in Infirmities

Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (II Cor. 12:10).

Paul was able to boast about his infirmities, or weaknesses (the word literally means "want of strength"). He could take pleasure in being reproached or insulted (the word is very strong indicating an intensive form of insult. The noun form is translated as "injurious" in I Timothy 1:13. He could be happy about necessities. (The word means "distresses" whether external or internal in nature.) The word translated "persecutions" means to put to flight, pursue, persecute. The word translated as "distresses" literally means a "narrow place." It presents the picture of one who is trapped and is therefore translated in the revision as "anguish" or "calamity."

But the question remains, how is it possible to triumph in the midst of trouble? How can we glory in tribulations also? How can we count it all joy when we fall into manifold temptations? Where do we get the strength to endure the fiery trial that inevitably comes upon us?

The answer is found in the preceding verse . . . My grace is sufficient for thee" (II Cor. 12:9). Our loving Father will never allow us to be tempted above that we are able. When we arrive at the proverbial "end of the rope" we are suddenly buoyed up by a power that is able to accomplish exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think. In the life of Paul this "grace" was sometimes realized by the coming of a friend (II Cor. 7:6) or by a vision in the night (Acts 18:9) or by an angel standing by his side (Acts 27:23-24) but, whenever or however he was in need of God, help was only a prayer away.

But again the nagging question presents itself. Why? Why do the righteous suffer? And again the answer is found in the text, for our ". . . strength is made perfect in weakness"

(II Cor. 12:9). Our spiritual muscles are developed by repeated demands of spiritual energy. Just as the athlete is honed for competition by a constant program of rigorous exercise the Christian is also prepared for the contests of the spirit by a life of perpetual struggle. Those who are sheltered from such circumstances do not develop real strength. They remain in immaturity and carnality and are incapable of eating spiritual meat or assuming the work of spiritual men. This is why Paul took pleasure in his infirmities . . . he knew that only through these could he ever be strong.

Jay Van Andel (co-founder of Amway Corp.) captured the meaning of this verse when he spoke to a group of salesman. After speaking of a myriad of problems which he had personally overcome in life, he quoted these memorable words:

The tree that never had to fight
For sun and sky and air and light
That stood out in the open plain
and always got its share of rain
Never became a forest king
But lived and died a grubby thing.

The man who never had to toil
By hand or mind mid life's turmoil
Who never had to win his share
Of sun and sky and light and air
Never became a manly man
But lived and died as he began.

Good timber does not grow in ease
The stronger the wind, the tougher the trees
The farther the sky the greater the length,
The rougher the storms, the greater the strength
By sun and cold and by rain and snows
In trees as in man, good timber grows.

Therefore let us take pleasure in infirmities.

Sarah's Pleasure

Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, after I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also (Gen. 28:12).

Abraham was 99 years old (Gen. 17:1). Sarah was 10 years younger (Gen. 17:17). It had ceased to be with her after the manner of women (Gen. 18:11).

When the messengers of God announced that she would have a son she laughed, apparently believing that she was too old to have "pleasure."

At the risk of being indiscreet it seems obvious that she had reference to a sexual relationship with her husband.

It is interesting to observe that the Hebrew word translated as "pleasure" is "ednah" which is defined by Strong as "pleasure, elicate, delight. . . ." It comes from the primary root "adan" which means to be soft or pleasant.

The word used by Sarah provides us with an interesting insight into Paradise for it is the very word used by God to describe the original garden which he prepared for Adam and Eve. "Ednah" or pleasure is the feminine of which "Eden" is the masculine. The Garden of Eden is therefore literally the Garden of Pleasure.

Jesus once lamented to Nicodemus, "If I have told you of earthly things and ye believed not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?" (John 3:12).

The joys of eternity are beyond human comprehension. We must wait for that face-to-face encounter before we will know as we are known.

In the mean while, however, it seems that God has provided us with a foretaste of eternal intimacy and delight by creating us "male and female" and ordaining that a man should cleave unto his wife and become one flesh with her.

When Adam "knew" his wife it meant that he became intimate with her so that a new life was produced. This intimate face-to-face experience was ordained by God to teach us something infinitely wonderful. The sexual union is so profound in its pleasure that it is utterly indescribable. Those who experience it in the context of marriage, however, gain insight regarding our entrance into that heavenly kingdom which shall never pass away.

When the Hebrew people witnessed fire descending upon the Tabernacle the experience was so profound that they cried "glory." The Hebrew word for "glory" is "kabod" which literally means "heavy." The experience was so "weighty" that it was for practical purposes beyond description.

In this regard it is interesting to observe that Paul describes the woman as the "glory of the man" (I Cor. 11:7). When commanded that we are to "flee from fornication" he reminds us that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Just as the "glory" of God was experienced in association with the Jewish temple we are instructed to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits which are God's (I Cor. 6:18-20).

I trust that it is not inappropriate for me to remind you that Isaac did not have a virgin birth. Abraham was not weak in faith, therefore ". . . he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God. And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And, therefore, it was imputed unto him righteousness."

The beautiful relationship between Abraham and Sarah provides us with allegorical understanding of the New Covenant which enables those who are barren to rejoice (Gal. 4:19 ff).

When Paul reminded the Ephesians that holy matrimony involved a man leaving his father and mother, and becoming one flesh with his wife he continued, ". . . this is a great mys-

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tery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church" (Eph. 5:32).

Thus, the pleasure of Sarah provides us with insight and anticipation . . . even so come Lord Jesus!

Two Poems by God

The Greek verb "poieo" means to "make" or "do." It is found 565 times in the N.T. Scriptures. The noun "poiema," however, is found only twice, and is the basis of our English word "poem."

Both times the word "poiema" or "poem" are found in the Scriptures they refer to the work of God. The first time is in Romans 1:20 where it is translated as "made," and the second is in Ephesians 2:10, where it is translated as "workmanship."

The first "poem" of God is the universe which He created. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are *made*, even his eternal power and Godhead. . . ."

We live in a "universe" and not a "multiverse." That which God created is characterized by rhyme and harmony. God is not the Author of confusion, but of peace. The heavens declare His glory and the firmament showeth His handiwork. All of God's creation reflects the unity and harmony of His very being. The nature of God is clearly seen by means of the things which He made. This is the first "poem" of God.

The second "poem" of God is the "new creation." The Scriptures teach: ". . . we are His *workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus to do good works. . . ."

The handiwork of God is "clearly seen" in creation. The man who can miss the majesty of a mountain, or the glories of Springtime is blind. How can a rational person gaze into the splendor of the heavens and not see something of God? That "poem" is obvious. So also is the second. Those who have been "born again" or "recreated" cannot be hidden. They are like a city that is set upon a hill. They do not need to "sound the trumpet" or in other ways seek to advertise what has happened to them. It is utterly obvious. Like flowers of the field the beauty and fragrance of their lives cannot be contained.

Unfortunately, something else is also obvious in the world around us. Not only do we "clearly see" the work of God, we also see the work of Satan. Not only do we see beauty and harmony, we also see disease and death. There are "tares among the wheat."

Fortunately, God will prevail. Someday the tares will be bound up and burned with unquenchable fire. Someday everything that worketh abomination or maketh a lie shall be cast into outer darkness. God will not be mocked! Someday every knee will bow to Him and every tongue will confess His glory.

In the meanwhile, however, we are caught up in conflict between good and evil. We are soldiers in the army of King Jesus and are commissioned to carry the Good News of His message to the ends of the earth. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, they are spiritual. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness in high places.

Someone has observed that there is more hope for someone who "cannot see" than there is for someone who "will not see." Some are blinded by circumstances beyond their control . . . and others are blind by choice.

May the God who opened the eyes of the blind touch your life with the power of His presence. May He work in you the same power and peace which He has manifested in the heavens, and the same beauty and fragrance which blossoms in the rose.

There are two great poems by God We can enjoy the one and experience the other. Maranatha!

Poorly???

"If anything is worth doing at all, it is worth doing poorly." This is a motto of the Elmbrook Church in Waukesha, Wisconsin where Stuart Briscoe preaches. He dropped this saying on me as he departed from Joplin to catch a flight back home and did not have time to elaborate. Based upon a brief conversation which I had with him over dinner, let me try to fill in the pieces.

World population in the days of Jesus is estimated to be about 250,000,000. Surely among that vast populace there must have been a great many highly educated and polished individuals, It is both interesting and significant, however, to note that He selected His original twelve apostles from among the unpolished peasants. None of these men, as far as we know, were noted for their education, their wealth, their social position, or their religious achievements. They were very ordinary men. Their Galilean accent was obvious and perhaps offensive. Yet, the church of our blessed Lord is built upon a foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone.

Since the original followers of Jesus were peasant folk who would be stereotyped as "hewers of wood and drawers of water" by the aristocracy of the day, it is not surprising that "not many wise, not many mighty, and not many noble" became involved in the Christian movement.

In spite of this, however, the early church seemed to grow. While Paul was in Ephesus, for example, all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10) and by the time Paul wrote to the Colossians the Gospel had been preached to every creature which was under heaven (Col. 1:23).

Today, it seems that a great many take exception to the policy of Jesus regarding the involvement of "unlearned and ignorant" individuals. Our preachers are expected to be educated,

cultured, and refined. Our musicians are expected to be polished and professional, We desire for our callers to be trained and tactful. Almost everything that we want to be done in the church today, we want to be done "well." So only certain people can sing, or play, or teach, or preach, or call. Our propensity to do things well and to place a premium upon what we think is excellent may prove to be counter productive. It may discourage the common folks from the joy of spiritual growth through exercise and involvement.

Our armed forces advertise for recruits by saying, "We don't ask for experience, we give it." The youngest recruit is encouraged to get involved and learn by making mistakes. The fact that he does things poorly does not prevent him from trying for he is not the only one who is a novice. When you have a whole boot camp of people doing things poorly it makes clumsy folks like us feel right at home.

Perhaps this is the genius of what Stuart Briscoe has been able to accomplish in the Elmbrook Church. If something is worth doing at all, then somebody is going to have to do it poorly before they develop the ability and the expertise to do it well. By emphasizing their little motto they take a lot of pressure off of the common folks who love Jesus but lack the professional touch of the more experienced and capable.

I am told that their attendance runs about four thousand at the Elmbrook Church.

Who knows, if something is worth doing at all, perhaps it is worth doing poorly?

Prayers . . . Wrath . . . and Disputing

(I Timothy 2:8)

The word translated “prayer” is “proseuchesthai.” This is the normal word for praying to God, and its general meaning is so clear that it needs no further comment.

The word for “wrath” is “orge.” It refers to a long standing resentment inclining to revenge. The word “thumos” refer to a blazing display of anger which quickly appears and subsides like fire in a pile of straw. Orge by contrast is deep seated and long lasting.

The word translated as “doubting” in the KJV and “disputing” in the revision is the word “dialogismou.” It comes from “dia” – through and “logismos” – a reasoning. It is primarily an inward deliberation, but inward thoughts frequently manifest themselves in some sort of an external controversy. For this reason the word is translated as “disputing” in Philippians 2:14 and disputation in Romans 14:1.

Thus we have before us an incongruous combination of “prayers,” “anger,” and “argumentation.”

We gain insight into this outrageous circumstance through a prophecy by Paul combined with the context of the pastoral epistles. Over ten years before the writing of I Timothy, Paul had warned the Ephesian elders of impending trouble. The problem would arise from two sources. First of all, outsiders would enter in like grievous wolves in a flock of sheep, and secondly from among the elders themselves divisive men would speak perverse things in order to obtain a following (Acts 20:29-30). The context of the pastoral epistles is a strong indication that these predictions were coming true. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus for the specific purpose of correcting those who had turned aside from “loving one another” to endless disputes.

This is the way the *Living Bible* paraphrases I Timothy 1:3-7:

As I said when I left for Macedonia, please stay there in Ephesus and try to stop the men who are teaching such wrong doctrine. Put an end to their myths and fables and their idea of being saved by finding favor with an endless chain of angels leading up to God – wild ideas that stir up questions and arguments instead of helping people accept God's plan of faith. What I am eager for is that all the Christians there will be filled with love that comes from pure hearts, and that their minds will be clean and their faith strong. But these teachers have missed this whole idea and spend their time arguing and talking foolishness. They want to become famous as teachers of the laws of Moses when they haven't the slightest idea what those laws really show us. . . .

I challenge you to read I and II Timothy and Titus with careful attention to Paul's strong desire to stop these people from arguing. The gentle, congenial spirit is woven repeatedly into the qualifications for elder (I Tim. 3:1-7) and is also mandatory for anyone who would be a vessel of honor fit for the Master's use (II Tim. 2:21-26).

When Michael, the archangel, contended and disputed with the devil about the body of Moses, he saw the futility of endless argumentation and withheld his accusations. He simply said, "The Lord rebuke thee" (Judge 9). Michael came to realize that God is perfectly capable of handling those in error and contented himself with something more constructive. Such a passive attitude is quite offensive to the legalistic mind. The legalist would much prefer to solve some genealogical controversy, dote over a question, or strive over a word than to place his arm around some weak brother and offer a word of encouragement. This is why Timothy was to avoid the useless babblings of those who had all the answers and give himself to the promotion of love, a wholesome spirit, faith and purity.

But the extremes of legalism cannot be appreciated without

Paul's divine instructions for prayer. The brethren were so strung out on debate that they could not pray without a frown and a verbal gouge at those whom they considered to be wrong.

Perhaps it is time that we too prayed everywhere, lifting up holy hands without wrath and disputation.