

LIVING IN THE PRESENT AGE

BY: D. L. Stephens

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Living in the present age

Long ago, William Law, who was a priest in the Church of England in the 1700s, warned that the world was then a greater enemy to the Christian than it was in apostolic times: It was a greater enemy because it had greater power over Christians by its favors, riches, honors, rewards, and protection than it had by the fire and fury of its persecutors.¹

In many ways that is still true today.

The 2014 Superbowl was the most viewed in history. It attracted nearly 112 million viewers. Without a doubt the National Football League produces some of the most alluring and entertaining spectacles in the history of the world. Besides the allure of sports there are other modern pleasures.

Today a person can fly for a thousand miles just to lie on a tropical beach. Or, one can enjoy food that has come from half-way around the world. There is also the appeal of the flesh in the vulgar, the pornographic or even immersive games of role playing that have captured so many.

Even in the first century the world had its allurements. Paul wrote to Timothy,

2 Tim. 4:9 make every effort to come to me soon; 10 for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 11 only Luke is with me.

¹ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: A Greater Enemy*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Paul's need for Timothy was intensified by the defection of Demas who, instead of loving the Lord's appearing (v. 8), "loved this present world." Demas deserted the apostle to embrace what he evidently thought was the safety, freedom, or comfort of Thessalonica.²

But despite the allure of fleshly pleasures the world also has its pressures to conform. There is group pressure; employer pressure; and there is government pressure. These pressures are applied to the Christian to get him to conform to a secular demand or rule. In many ways the world is hostile to Christianity, and it is growing more so every day.

Recently, the chief justice of the Vatican, Cardinal Leo Burke, said that the policies of the government of the United States have become progressively more hostile to Christian civilization.³

Our government officials are secular, and have little respect for Christianity and its institutions. Only the residue of laws passed years ago act as a restraint on them. Burke said, "the government wants to restrict the exercise of the freedom of religion to freedom of worship; that is, it holds that one is free to act according to his conscience within the confines of his place of worship but that, once the person leaves the place of worship, the government can constrain him to act against his rightly-formed conscience, even in the most serious

² Litfin, A. D. (1985). 2 Timothy. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (2 Ti 4:10). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³ <http://stlouis.cbslocal.com/2014/03/24/vatican-chief-justice-obamas-policies-have-become-progressively-more-hostile-toward-Christian-civilization/>

of moral questions.” Cases in point: Hobby Lobby; Chick-fil-A; and several small wedding caterers.

This is a change that has come about in the last generation.

Professing Christians in this country have lost their jobs; their careers, their businesses and their access to education because of the conflicts between the policies of government and their consciences.

In other countries, especially in Moslem countries, there are some whose choice was convert to Islam, leave the country, or die. That choice might one day come to America. Let’s pray it doesn’t.

But we should not be surprised when the world becomes hostile to Christians. The Lord told his disciples,

Matthew 10:24 “a disciple is not above his teacher, nor a slave above his master. 25 “it is enough for the disciple that he become like his teacher, and the slave like his master. If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!

So, in the face of this growing hostility, how does the Christian live in the present world—and remain true to the faith?

When the learned and wealthy John Selden was dying he said to Archbishop Usher, “I have surveyed most of the learning that is among the sons of men, and my study is filled with books and manuscripts on various subjects.” He had 8000 volumes in his library. He went on to say, “But at present I cannot recollect any passage out of all my books and papers whereon I can rest my

soul, save this from the sacred scriptures.”⁴ Then he read the passage from Paul’s letter to Titus. In the 2nd Chapter of that letter the apostle wrote,

Titus 2:11 for the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for himself a people for his own possession, zealous for good deeds.

He said, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men...

This does not mean that everyone is saved—but that the offer is there. You may be among those who have accepted the offer. The offer is a gift. It is not something you have to earn by your own efforts like the Pharisees thought. God’s grace is in Christ, and salvation is in Him.

Paul said that the grace has “appeared...instructing us.” And how do you think we have received this instruction in the grace of God? How was it brought to us? It was not easy. I have a quotation for you,

Simon Greenleaf was perhaps the greatest authority known to England and America on the subject of legal evidence. He wrote a book entitled, “*The Testimony of the Evangelists*,” in which he said this,

⁴ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (529). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

The great truths which the apostles declared were that Christ had risen from the dead and that only through repentance from sin, and faith in him, could men hope for salvation. This doctrine they asserted with one voice, everywhere, not only under the greatest discouragements, but in the face of the most appalling terrors that can be presented to the mind of man. Their master had recently perished as a malefactor, by the sentence of a public tribunal. His religion sought to overthrow the religions of the whole world. The laws of every country were against the teachings of His disciples. The interests and passions of all the rulers and great men in the world were against them. The fashion of the world was against them. Propagating this new faith, even in the most inoffensive and peaceful manner, they could expect nothing but contempt, opposition, revilings, bitter persecutions, stripes, imprisonments, torments and cruel deaths. Yet this faith they zealously did propagate; and all these miseries they endured undismayed, nay, rejoicing. As one after another was put to a miserable death...

Greenleaf says more, but I think you get the picture. This message of salvation that they delivered into your hands came with great suffering on the part of the people who brought it to you.

What is even more sobering is this: the word that these apostles preached is the grace of God, and they have entrusted it to us.

So we must ask, why did these apostles do what they did? What did they have that many today do not have? I will tell you.

Commitment.

Paul said,

1 Cor. 9:16 for if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.

That word “compulsion” means: “An obligation of a compelling nature.”

Otherwise why would he tell the Corinthians that...

2 Corinthians 11:24 five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. 25 three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Now why did he endure all that? Because he was committed to Christ and the preaching of the gospel just like we should be.

How did Paul do it? How did he endure such persecution and suffering? He told the Philippians,

Philippians 4:11 not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. 12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

In his labors he overcame through his faith and confidence in Christ. Paul was committed.

We can do the same today, but we have to be committed.

There is the story of the man in Haiti who wanted to sell his house for \$2,000. Another man wanted to buy it, but because he was poor, he couldn't afford the \$2000. So they sat down and bargained. After a lot of haggling the owner agreed to sell the house for \$1000. But he had one stipulation: he would retain ownership of one six inch peg that protruded from the outside wall just above the door.

After several years, the original owner returned and asked if he could have the house back, but the new owner was unwilling to sell. So the first owner went out, found the carcass of a dead goat, and hung it from the peg he still owned. It wasn't long before the house became unlivable. Since the previous owner would not relent and remove the dead goat the family was then forced to sell the house to the owner of the peg.

The moral of the story is this: if we leave the devil with even one small peg in our life, he will return to hang his dead goat on it. And with that kind of odor Christ will not want to live there. (If you take my meaning.)

Commitment means you don't leave the devil a peg.

The gospel message has been handed down to us through the work of the apostles, and it is instructing us to deny ungodliness, worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and Godly in the present age. And that means we must deny all of the ungodliness of the world and not just a part of it.

Do you want to know how to succeed through Christ in the present age? It's not complicated.

Think what the Lord and the apostles have done for you, and then deny ungodliness, and worldly desires just like they did.

Jude in his letter gives us three typical examples of how people have fallen into ungodliness:

The first is Israel. God delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage by such wondrous power that the word of it preceded them into Palestine. But after God had divided the sea to save them from the Pharaoh the Israelites rebelled against God, desiring to return to Egypt instead. They had the temerity to ask again for slavery rather than God's care in the wilderness. For that God caused them to wander in the wilderness for forty years.

People today who have been saved from their sins and then turn back to their old habits and manner of life are like the Israelites who wanted to return to Egypt. It is an ungodly desire to abandon Christ and to return to sin.

And then there was Korah whose story we read about in Numbers Chapter 16. He led a rebellion against God, and against the authority of Moses to speak for God.

God has the sovereign right to appoint religious order, or the order of human society as he sees fit. To deny God's choice is to commit apostasy. Apostasy is rebellion, and it is a grave sin. God had appointed Moses as leader and Aaron his brother as high priest. Aaron's family was appointed as priests. This was God's sovereign choice.

Korah led a group who wanted the priestly office for themselves. They said all Israel is equal, and that Moses was lording over the people.

But God rejected their ungodly protest.

Korah and all his perished suddenly when the ground opened and swallowed them. As the scripture says, "They went down to Sheol alive."

Men and women today are rebelling against God's appointed order. God has appointed the order of church government as He has desired. But many churches are ignoring God's appointed order and are establishing their own. It is ungodly and it is apostasy. Worldly people are rejecting God's appointed order for the human race. Men are rejecting God's provisions for themselves and are telling themselves they can marry other men. Women think they can marry other women. It is apostasy.

Don't join them in the rebellion.

And then Jude speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah: these were people who engaged in gross sexual immorality and tried to spread their ungodliness to the innocent. In the end the smoke of their destruction went up like a furnace.

God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and made them examples of what happens to that type of ungodly behavior.

Moreover, Paul in his letter to the Romans makes it perfectly clear that people who give that kind of ungodly behavior "heartly approval" will suffer the same fate as its practitioners.⁵

So, do you want to live in the present world and avoid ungodliness? Avoid their behavior. Deny their ungodliness. Remember what the Psalmist wrote,

PSALM 1:1 HOW BLESSED IS THE MAN WHO DOES
NOT WALK IN THE COUNSEL OF THE WICKED,
NOR STAND IN THE PATH OF SINNERS,
NOR SIT IN THE SEAT OF SCOFFERS!
2 BUT HIS DELIGHT IS IN THE LAW OF THE
LORD,

⁵ Romans 1:32.

AND IN HIS LAW HE MEDITATES DAY AND
NIGHT.

3 HE WILL BE LIKE A TREE *FIRMLY* PLANTED
BY STREAMS OF WATER,

WHICH YIELDS ITS FRUIT IN ITS SEASON
AND ITS LEAF DOES NOT WITHER;
AND IN WHATEVER HE DOES, HE PROSPERS.

4 THE WICKED ARE NOT SO,
BUT THEY ARE LIKE CHAFF WHICH THE WIND
DRIVES AWAY.

5 THEREFORE THE WICKED WILL NOT STAND
IN THE JUDGMENT,
NOR SINNERS IN THE ASSEMBLY OF THE
RIGHTEOUS.

6 FOR THE LORD KNOWS THE WAY OF THE
RIGHTEOUS,
BUT THE WAY OF THE WICKED WILL PERISH.⁶

Then Paul said to Titus, deny worldly desires⁷,
these are desires that are at enmity with God, or things
that are morally reprehensible.

There is the story of some men who were
shipwrecked and left drifting on the ocean in a lifeboat.
As the days passed without rescue, their rations of food
and fresh water gave out. The men became thirsty, and
then delirious. One night while the others were asleep,
one man ignored all the warnings and began to drink the
ocean water. Then he found out that the more he drank
the more he wanted, and he couldn't stop. He drank until
he died.

⁶ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (Ps 1:1–6). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁷ κοσμικός: these are desires that are at enmity with God, or things that are morally reprehensible. [αἱ κοσμικαὶ ἐπιθυμίαι *worldly desires*, Tit 2:12]

The reason he died is that ocean water contains seven times more salt than the human body can safely ingest. Drinking it, a person dehydrates because the kidneys demand extra water to flush the overload of salt. The more salt water someone drinks, the thirstier he gets. He actually dies of thirst.

When we lust, we become like this man who drank salt water. We thirst desperately for something that looks like what we want. But we don't realize that it is exactly the opposite of what we really need.

In fact, it can kill us.

Paul said, avoid lust and live sensibly. That means to live soberly, moderately, and in a way that shows self-control.⁸

Self-control is not something we can do today and it's finished. It's a constant occupation. Therein lies the problem. It is as Proverbs tells us, "He that rules his spirit is greater than he who takes a city."⁹

It is said that Alexander the Great was one of the few men in history who deserved the adjective "great." His biographer describes him as a passionate and impulsive man. Yet by a magnificent display of will power he held rein on his passions. When his armies passed through Asia in conquest he was in complete mastery of himself. In all this campaign of conquest he kept himself unspotted.

But a day came when Alexander and his officers held a banquet, and as they drank they became drunk and they sang songs comparing Alexander to the mythical Castor and Pollux. But one of the generals, whose name was Clitus—a dear friend of Alexander's, objected to the comparison and he reminded Alexander of how he had

⁸ Σωφρόνως: soberly, moderately, showing self-control.

⁹ Prov. 16:32.

saved his life in one of the recent battles, and he went on to say that Alexander had bought his fame with the blood of the Macedonian officers. Moreover, he told Alexander to go and associate with his lickspittle Persians who bowed the knee to him and told him what he wanted to hear.

Stung by these words—even though they came from his closest friend—Alexander reached for his sword. But others rushed Clitus from the banquet hall. A moment later he returned and when Alexander saw him standing under some curtains quoting lines from a Greek poet who disparaged Alexander’s conquests, Alexander took a spear in hand and drove it through his friend.

Later, remorse seized Alexander. He had acted impulsively, without self-control in a drunken state that did not prevent the fury of his anger. For days he lay writhing in remorse, calling the name of his friend, but to no avail. Clitus was dead.

As great as he was Alexander still fell to the proverb, “He that rules his spirit is greater than he who takes a city.”

What did Paul say to Titus, “Live sensibly, righteously, and godly.” Sensibly means, soberly, moderately, showing self-control.

Live righteously.¹⁰ Job lived uprightly even though he suffered the loss of his children, his health and nearly his every material possession. Noah lived uprightly despite the influence of a world of people completely given over to violence and corruption.¹¹ Joseph lived uprightly even though his brothers sold him into slavery and he ended up the property of Potiphar, Pharaoh’s

¹⁰ **δικαίως**: uprightly.

¹¹ Genesis 6:8-11.

officer, who was also the captain of the bodyguard.¹² In bondage Joseph endured the temptation of his master's wife and the privations of jail rather than offend the law of God.

Live godly.¹³ Abraham was a godly man, so much so that the scriptures call him "the friend of God." Isaiah wrote,

Isaiah 41:8 "but you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
descendant of Abraham my friend,

How could this be? James tells us,

James 2:21 was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 you see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; 23 and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "and Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," and he was called the friend of God.

Jesus said to his disciples,

John 15:12 "this is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 "greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 "you are my friends if you do what I command you.

Do what he commands you.

When do you do that?

¹² Ibid., *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (Ge 37:36). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

¹³ εὐσεβῶς: in a Godly manner

In the present age—despite all the temptations, allurements, pressures, and coercions. Regardless of what your friends say, what your employer says, or the government does—in the present age. Do what God commands you.

Do you think God does not know about the temptations that face us in this age of the world? He knows. And he knows you. He knows how much you can stand. He knows when you need help. So ask him.

Looking for the blessed hope –the hope is what you are to receive when He returns. It is as Peter wrote in his first letter,

1 Peter 1:13 therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 as obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the holy one who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, “you shall be holy, for I am holy.”

While we are living sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, we are to be looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. And He will return despite the doubts and contradictions of His detractors and enemies.

When Christ came the first time he presented himself to the Jewish people as the Messiah. He was riding on a donkey.¹⁴ A great multitude from Jerusalem went forth to meet him. Many of the people cried hosannas—cries of praise and joy. But not all of them cried hosannas. Some of them were filled with jealousy and bitter hatred.

¹⁴ John 12:14.

First He fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah 9:9 that says:

Rejoice greatly, o daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, o daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; he is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

The manner of His entrance into Jerusalem also showed that he was coming in peace, not war.¹⁵

Even so, the Jewish authorities rejected Jesus—then.

But a day is coming when the ones who rejected Him will be filled with deep regret.

Matthew 5:31 “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. 32 “all the nations will be gathered before Him; and he will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats;

And believe me when I say, you do not want to be numbered with the goats.

Paul said that the One who comes is He who gave Himself for us to accomplish two things: He wanted to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession—zealous for good deeds.

Do the good deeds in the present age.

¹⁵ Wilson, J. L. (2009). *Fresh Sermons*. Fresno, CA: Willow City Press.

The Truth

A news report that appeared in the Miami Herald a number of years ago said that a former theology professor who declared that he does not believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead was ordained as one of the highest-ranking bishops in the Church of England. David Jenkins said that he believes that some of the central elements of the Christian creed—such as the virgin birth, and the resurrection of Jesus—are symbolic rather than literal truth. Furthermore, he said that even though he believed Jesus was both man and God, other people did not have to believe this to be good Christians.¹⁶

This statement entirely contradicts what Jesus said,

John 8:24 ... “You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world. I said therefore to you, that you shall die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins.”

Jesus left no such option for people either to believe or not believe. Unbelief carries adverse consequences.

Moreover, it is apparent that the bishop has one standard of truth, while Jesus has another. The article goes on to say. “One of the glories of the Church of England is that it has always allowed many different shades of opinion within it,” said the Archbishop of York, John Habgood. He had just ordained David Jenkins as Bishop of Durham.

Why would the Archbishop make such a remark? Does he mean by his remark that the “many different shades of meaning” are all equally true, or that the

¹⁶ *The Miami Herald*, July 8, 1984.

Church of England tolerates false and contradictory doctrines merely to maintain peace?

Whether for peace or otherwise there can be no doubt that the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the foundation doctrine of Christianity. Without the resurrection there is no Christianity.¹⁷

The Apostle Paul said that belief in the resurrection is required to become a Christian.

Romans 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

The requirement that a person believe the truth is not popular in modern America, and in many other parts of the world. The idea that there could be an obligation that one believe certain historical facts in order to become a Christian gains little traction among modern churchmen. The reason is that, like the bishop in the Anglican Church, large numbers of people have come to believe that truth is relative. Many would argue that all thought is conditioned by social context—this is the canon of postmodernism. In America today the idea promoted as the most important is that one should hold to “values,” and these values include tolerance of diverse opinions and practices while promoting diversity in the social context. These values are extolled so much in public comment that Americans have come to accept them as virtue, and opposition to them as vice—the latter to be censured or punished. Yet, neither tolerance nor diversity embraces the pursuit of the truth.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:13-18.

Americans have forgotten the reason for tolerance. The reason we are to be tolerant of different opinions is not because they are equally right—in the sense that they are all true—but because we are trying to minimize conflict. Tolerance has as its main benefit the forbearance of different views of a subject on which honest and honorable people differ in order to promote peace and harmony. Human society is pleasanter when we can go about our affairs without frequent confrontations about beliefs or practices. While it is true in a limited sense that forbearance makes the daily activities of life easier to bear, yet, there are limits even to such forbearance. There is a point in forbearance where one stops and insists that the truth be honored. For example, if someone should insist that there was no Holocaust during World War II then that claim would meet with immediate contradiction, and there would likely be considerable evidence offered to prove the Holocaust did happen. Forbearance can take us just so far. While it differs between people regarding how far they are willing to go just to keep the peace, most have limits. This is so, even among the most tolerant of the multiculturalists. For example, what advocate of multiculturalism is there who is forbearing toward racism?

The answer is few, if any.

The real test of forbearance is not so much the limits of forbearance on a particular subject, but the subject itself. People differ on what to forbear, and in what context to practice the forbearance.

Subjects that include what a person believes to be fundamentally true are less likely to expect tolerance of contradiction.

Southern Baptists have for years been struggling among themselves to reconcile the policy differences between conservatives and liberals. The issues the Baptists face may be reduced to questions about truth.

For example, an incident occurred in which the President of the Kentucky Baptist Convention, Hershael W. York, asked Georgetown College, a small Baptist college, to consider hiring for its religion department someone who would teach a literal interpretation of the Bible. The President of Georgetown College, William H. Crouch, Jr., objected on the grounds that the issue interfered with academic freedom. Yet, academic freedom is only a smokescreen clouding the underlying cause of the conflict. David W. Key, director of Baptist Studies at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, put it more clearly. He said, “The real underlying issue is that fundamentalism in the Southern Baptist form is incompatible with higher education. In fundamentalism, you have all the truths. In education, you’re searching for truths.”¹⁸

To any humanist “fundamentalism” is a pejorative. To claim to know the truth is to academicians like Key something akin to secular blasphemy. But when Key says that “fundamentalism ... is incompatible with higher education,” he might be stating the truth, however not for the reason he believes. The weakness in the academic position is that constant pursuit of the truth never arrives at the truth. Pursuit of the truth is not an end in itself. Key, and others of the same belief system, have the obligation to state their methods for determining the truth, and their progress thus far. If they have spent a lifetime pursuing the truth, but have not found it, then it follows that their methods are faulty. It appears what the academicians like Key are doing is equivocating, and deluding themselves by calling it academic freedom.

¹⁸ *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, “Future of Baptist colleges ‘fragile’ as conflicts continue,” Finder, A., Friday, July 28, 2006, B7.

A day comes when a person must face the facts, and choose to embrace the truth or forever be in denial.

Ezekiel and the Priests of Baal.

In the book of 1 Kings, the Bible tells the story of how the prophet Elijah confronted the sons of Israel and the worshippers of Baal at Mount Carmel. He asked them the timeless question. It is a question that comes to everyone, not only the bishops of the Church of England, but to every man and woman within whom lives the spirit to inquire after the truth about God. The Bible tells us,

1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long *will* you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him.”

The people of our own time answer that question in ways that are similar to the people of that far off day.

1 Kings 18:21 But the people did not answer him a word.

Whatever their reasons might have been for not answering the prophet, their silence is eloquent. It tells us that they had neither the courage, nor the conviction to oppose the priests of Baal.

Yes, the worshippers of Baal had the support of King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel. And, yes, it is true that the king commanded the army, which Jezebel would readily use in defense of the religion she practiced. It is seldom different. Even today, the truth many times finds itself competing with persons or institutions that hold formidable power—together with falsehood. On that ancient day the people of Israel had to choose between an inanimate stone and the God of Heaven. Who had the truth? Was it the worshippers of Baal, or was it Ezekiel?

The test came at the suggestion of Ezekiel.

1 Kings 18:23 “Now let them give us two oxen; and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire *under it*; and I will prepare the other ox, and lay it on the wood, and I will not put a fire *under it*. 24 “Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And all the people answered and said, “That is a good idea.”

Here was an infallible test to determine the truth. The story tells us that the priests of Baal,

1 Kings 18:26 ...took the ox which was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, “O Baal, answer us.” But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made. 27 And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Call out with a loud voice, for he is a god; either he is occupied or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.” 28 So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. 29 And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice; but there was no voice, no one answered, and no one paid attention.

By this time it became evident to even the most prejudiced observer that Baal was a rock, not a god, and the priests of Baal were deluded by falsehood. To enforce the truth of this in the minds and hearts of the Israelites, Elijah had them “...come near.” It is as if he said, “I want you to see this, and seeing, believe.”

1 Kings 18:30 So all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. 31 And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Israel shall be your name." 32 So with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a trench around the altar, large enough to hold two measures of seed. 33 Then he arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid *it* on the wood. And he said, "Fill four pitchers with water and pour *it* on the burnt offering and on the wood." 34 And he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. 35 And the water flowed around the altar, and he also filled the trench with water. 36 Then it came about at the time of the offering of the *evening* sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. 37 "Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that this people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and *that* Thou hast turned their heart back again." 38 Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God."

Sometimes it takes a demonstration to help people see the truth. This is not frequently done, and in modern times almost never. Most of the time people are allowed to go their own way, and are expected to dig out the

facts for themselves. Few do. Nevertheless, the truth is there whether a person believes it or not, as in the case of the ancient Israelites who did not believe until they saw with their own eyes.

Isaiah wrote concerning the idols to which the people of his generation worshipped,

Isaiah 46:1 Bel has bowed down, Nebo stoops over; Their images are *consigned* to the beasts and the cattle. The things that you carry are burdensome, A load for the weary *beast*. 2 They stooped over, they have bowed down together; They could not rescue the burden, But have themselves gone into captivity. 3 “Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, And all the remnant of the house of Israel, You who have been borne by Me from birth, And have been carried from the womb; 4 Even to your old age, I shall be the same, And even to your graying years I shall bear *you!* I have done *it*, and I shall carry *you*; And I shall bear *you*, and I shall deliver *you*. 5 “To whom would you liken Me, And make Me equal and compare Me, That we should be alike? 6 “Those who lavish gold from the purse And weigh silver on the scale Hire a goldsmith, and he makes it *into* a god; They bow down, indeed they worship it. 7 “They lift it upon the shoulder and carry it; They set it in its place and it stands *there*. It does not move from its place. Though one may cry to it, it cannot answer; It cannot deliver him from his distress. 8 *”Remember this, and be assured; Recall it to mind, you transgressors. 9 “Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I *am* God, and there is no one like Me, 10 Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not

been done, Saying, ‘My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure’; 11 Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned *it, surely* I will do it. 12 “Listen to Me, you stubborn-minded, Who are far from righteousness. 13 “I bring near My righteousness, it is not far off; And My salvation will not delay. And I will grant salvation in Zion, *And My glory* for Israel.

Isaiah wrote the truth in his own day that shouts down to us through the centuries: “I am God, and there is no other.” And “Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass.”

You can believe that.

Ignore what the nay Sayers and doubters of our own age say, for they are the “priests of Baal” praying to stones. There is truth. And the truth is near because God has brought it near.

Separating the truth from the lie

Yet the truth competes with the lie, and each person must learn to distinguish between the two. Jesus once used these pointed words to the Jews,

John 8:43 “Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. 44 “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. 45 “But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 “Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I

... speak truth, why do you not believe Me? 47
“He who is of God hears the words of God;
for this reason you do not hear *them*, because
you are not of God.”

- The devil does not stand in the truth,
because there is no truth in him.
- Whenever the devil speaks a lie, he
speaks from his own *nature*.
- The devil is a liar, and the father of lies.

In the New Testament the words that are translated “truth” carry the meanings of dependability, truthfulness, and uprightness of character. In these NT instances the Hebrew sense predominates; the Hebrew sense accords with the Old Testament idea in which one regards more highly the basis of truth in a reliable person than that of the mere facts of the case.¹⁹ For example, in an exchange with the Apostle Thomas, Jesus said,

John 14:6 ... “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

- He **is** the truth.

In the New Testament truth is also used in the absolute sense of that which is real and complete as opposed to what is false and wanting.²⁰ Examples of the second use of the word truth may be seen in the Gospel of Mark and Paul’s letter to the Ephesians,

Mark 5:25 And a woman who had had a
hemorrhage for twelve years, 26 and had
endured much at the hands of many
physicians, and had spent all that she had and

¹⁹ *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

was not helped at all, but rather had grown worse, 27 after hearing about Jesus, came up in the crowd behind *Him*, and touched His cloak. 28 For she thought, “If I just touch His garments, I shall get well.” 29 And immediately the flow of her blood was dried up; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her affliction. 30 And immediately Jesus, perceiving in Himself that the power *proceeding* from Him had gone forth, turned around in the crowd and said, “Who touched My garments?” 31 And His disciples said to Him, “You see the multitude pressing in on You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’” 32 And He looked around to see the woman who had done this. 33 But the woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him, and told Him the whole truth. 34 And He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your affliction.”

- She told Him the whole truth. She confessed the facts.

And as Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 4:25 Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one *of you*, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.

- Speak truth.

As in these examples, we think, therefore, of the truth in the absolute sense of that which is real and complete as opposed to what is false and wanting.²¹

²¹ *The New Bible Dictionary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.) 1962.

Jesus before Pilate.

On that Day of Preparation on which the Jewish authorities brought Jesus to trial before the Roman Governor, Pilate,

John 18:33 Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” 35 Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?” 36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.” 37 Pilate therefore said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” 38 Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”

Pilate had the Truth standing before him and was not able to see it. There are numerous reasons why this might happen. But as it was in Pilate’s case so it is in the circumstances that face modern man, the reasons are largely self-imposed. Pilate was a Roman soldier who had risen to the rank of prefect, or military governor. As such it is likely that he had a Roman worldview.²²

²²<http://weltanschauung.wordmeanings.org/>: worldview: Ger. \Welt”an”schau`ung\, n.; pl. {Weltanschauungen}. [G.] Lit., world view; a conception of the course of events in, and

A person's worldview can work either for or against them in their recognition of the truth. If the worldview is secular then its holder will not recognize spiritual truth even if it stands before him.²³ Alas, such is the case with higher education, in general, in the US today.

Note these ideas that attach to the truth:

- Objective truth is first a Person: Jesus as deity revealed the source of truth as in Himself. All truth has its basis in Him and is derived from Him. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life..." John 14:6.
- There is objective truth that exists apart from opinion or belief. Baal was not a god.
- Aristotle said, "The truth is saying what is, is, and what isn't, isn't." This is called the common sense definition of truth.
- The objective truth is not an attitude. Truth is not **how** we know, but **what** we know. Sincerity does not mean truth. A bishop can sincerely believe that all opinions are valid, but that is not the truth.
- Truth does **not** mean, "...**known by all**" or "**believed by all**." Even if everyone believes a lie, it is still a lie. Truth is not determined by an opinion poll.

of the purpose of, the world as a whole, forming a philosophical view or apprehension of the universe; the general idea embodied in a cosmology.

²³ John 1:10; John 14:17; Romans 8:5-7; 1 Cor. 1:21; 1 John 4:5, 6.

- Truth does **not** mean, “**publicly proved.**” An objective truth can be privately known—i.e., a treasure known only by the one who hid it. Also it could be known without being proved.
- Objective truth is independent of the knower and his consciousness. For example, “I itch,” is a subjective truth, but the statement that, “Jesus rose from the dead,” is a reference to an objective truth.

Logic teaches that the truth can be established by testimony. For example, George Campbell, D. D., principal of the Marshall College, Aberdeen, Scotland, in correspondence between himself and David Hume, wrote a reply to Hume’s philosophically worded argument that it was inherently impossible to produce proof sufficient to offset what he declared to be the conclusive presumption against a miracle.

Campbell replied, “In a number of concurrent testimonies, where there has been no previous concert there is a probability distinct from that which may be termed the sum of the probabilities resulting from the testimony of the witnesses; a probability which would remain even though the witnesses were of such character as to merit no faith at all. This probability arises from the concurrence itself. That such a concurrence should spring from chance is as one to infinity; that is, in other words, morally impossible. If, therefore, concert be excluded, there remains no cause but the reality of the fact.”²⁴

²⁴ Linton, I. H., *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, p. 55.

The “reality of the fact” is the same as establishing the truth concerning a fact, where a fact is an event, or a thing that has been done in the history of the world.

The Bible teaches that witnesses may establish truth. The Law of Moses says,

Deut. 17:6 “On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses, he who is to die shall be put to death; he shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. (See also, Mt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1.)

The Law of Moses told the ancient Israelites that concurrent testimony by reliable witnesses is sufficient to convict. Jesus, Himself, used the same criterion to establish the truth. Further, it is worthwhile to remember that the truthfulness of the events in the life of Christ is established by the concurrence of the testimonies of the Apostles as recorded and transmitted to us by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Truth as experience

But mere knowledge of objective truth, or the truthfulness of an event is not all there is to the idea of truth. Jesus spoke of truth as an experience. John, in his gospel, writes in the eighth chapter that,

John 8:31 Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you abide in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

A disciple is a learner, a follower, a believer. The word used in John’s gospel carries the idea of thought accompanied by endeavor. The intent of discipleship is to become like the Teacher. And Jesus connects the idea of discipleship with abiding in His word; that is, of remaining, or continuing within the reach of His teaching. His word, when it has its intended effect,

results in a changed character in the disciple to the end that the disciple becomes more Christlike, and it results in behavior that is like Christ. The proof of discipleship is in the follower who abides in His word.

The second thing Jesus attached to abiding in His word was that the disciple would "...know the truth." This means that the disciple would come to know, recognize or perceive the truth as a result of abiding in His word.

The present state of the world is that it constantly experiences the Lie, and because of that it cannot see the truth.

Paul in his defense before Agrippa and Festus told these rulers about his experience with the risen Christ, and he summarized to them by outlining the facts of the gospel. But then as Paul testified in his own defense,

Acts 26:24 ... Festus *said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! *Your* great learning is driving you mad." 25 But Paul *said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 26 "For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.

Paul had not known the truth before his experience on the road to Damascus; afterward he did. Afterward, he not only knew it, but he experienced the effects of it. Therefore, one can know the truth both intellectually, and by experience. The word of God, as contained in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, is the truth.

Study it.

The Good Confession

Loyalty of the believer to Christ

What one must understand at the outset is that the confession required of the person who would become a disciple of Christ is not a confession of sin. That each person is a sinner is a given. And to confess one's sins, while commendable, does not make the confessor a Christian. The proper confession to become a disciple of Christ is the Good Confession. The Good Confession is as Jesus Himself described in the gospel of Matthew,

Matt. 10:32 “Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 “But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.

- Notice that the subject of the confession is not personal sin.
- For the believer the object of confession is Christ.
- The object of confession for Christ is the believer.
- The idea involved in confession is not mere acknowledgement, or recognition; it is loyalty.
- The opposite of confession is denial.

Vine says of the word “confession” in this context,

In Matt. 10:32 and Luke 12:8 the construction of this verb (*homologeō*) with *en*, (in), followed by the dative case of the personal pronoun, has a special significance, namely, to confess in a person's name, the nature of the confession being determined by the context, the

suggestion being to make a public confession. Thus the statement, “every one ... who shall confess Me (lit., in Me, i.e., in My case) before men; him (lit., in him, i.e., in his case) will I also confess before My Father ...,” **conveys the thought of confessing allegiance to Christ** as one’s Master and Lord, and, on the other hand, of acknowledgment, on His part, of the faithful one as being His worshipper and servant, His loyal follower; this is appropriate to the original idea in *homologeō* of being identified in thought or language.²⁵

In this connection there is an interesting comparison between Romans Chapter 14:11 and Isaiah 45:23.

In the New American Standard Bible Romans 14:11 says,

For it is written,

“As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me,

And every tongue shall give praise to God.”

But the American Standard Bible, King James Version, New King James Version, and New International Version read “...**will confess** to God.”

But the book of Isaiah, where we find the prophecy referred to in Romans, says,

Isaiah 45:23 “I HAVE SWORN BY MYSELF,
THE WORD HAS GONE FORTH FROM MY MOUTH
IN RIGHTEOUSNESS
AND WILL NOT TURN BACK,

²⁵ Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). Vol. 2: *Vine’s Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (224). Old Tappan NJ: Revell. *homologeō* (ὁμολογέω).

THAT TO ME EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, EVERY
TONGUE WILL SWEAR *ALLEGIANCE*.

Here Isaiah used the Hebrew word *shaw-bah*, meaning “swear, to take an oath, to cause to take an oath, to adjure.”

On the day of his crucifixion Christ stood trial before the Great Sanhedrin. The High Priest Caiaphas applied to Him the Oath of the Testimony. It says in the Mishnah that if one shall say, “I adjure you by the Almighty, by Sabaoth, by the Gracious and Merciful, by the Long-Suffering, by the Compassionate, or by any of the divine titles, behold they are bound to answer.”²⁶

Caiaphas, in effect, placed Jesus under oath. Matthew wrote,

Matt. 26:63 But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to Him, “I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.”

Jesus answered, “You have said it yourself...” Luke gives His answer as, “Yes, I am.” Luke 22:70.

Jesus did not deny Himself.

Loyalty and confession

Loyalty is an important idea to bear in mind when you think about your confession of Christ. As Vine says, the confession of Christ is a statement of **allegiance**. **It is akin to an oath of loyalty**. An example of this type of servant, and loyal follower, is that of Ittai the Gittite.

In the book of 2 Samuel in the 15th chapter we read of Ittai the Gittite, the native of Gath. He was a Philistine in the army of King David. When Absalom revolted and threatened to strike his father and all those loyal to him

²⁶ Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone*, p. 26.

with the edge of the sword, David fled Jerusalem with his loyal company. The scripture says that David paused at the last house to watch his servants pass before him.

2 Sam. 15:19 Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why will you also go with us? Return and remain with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile; *return* to your own place. 20 "You came *only* yesterday, and shall I today make you wander with us, while I go where I will? Return and take back your brothers; mercy and truth be with you." 21 But Ittai answered the king and said, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be." 22 Therefore David said to Ittai, "Go and pass over." So Ittai the Gittite passed over with all his men and all the little ones who *were* with him.

When next we see Ittai the Gittite it is at Mahana'im when David's army is again numbered and organized. Ittai is in command of a third part of the army. 2 Sam. 18:2, 5, 12. The loyalty of Ittai the Gittite to David produced loyalty in David to Ittai. Ittai confessed David and did not deny him even in difficult times. The last time we see Ittai the Gittite David has promoted him to much greater responsibility.

I am the King's man

The television network A&E ran a series of films a few years ago about Horatio Hornblower. In one of the films entitled, *The Duchess and the Devil*, there is a scene in which the First Mate, Mr. Bracegirdle, of the British frigate *Indefatigable*, is in the galley speaking to a junior officer, Mr. Hunter. There is some question about Mr. Hunter's loyalty to Horatio Hornblower.

Bracegirdle says to the junior officer, “He’s a lucky dog that Hornblower, eh? To be tuck into the capons? Roast beef. Plain duff? Bet you envy him, Mr. Hunter?”

Mr. Hunter, who is seated, chewing on a biscuit, says, “No, Sir. Beef and biscuit does me fine.”

The First Mate then leans over and says, “You, uh, sail with Mr. Hornblower tomorrow, you know?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“It goes without saying that he can depend on your whole-hearted support?”

Mr. Hunter rises and stands at attention. He stares forward and says, “I am the king’s man, sir. I follow my captain’s orders.”

- “I am the king’s man, sir.” In this answer is the essence of confession.
- The essence is loyalty, not merely recognition.
- For sure, Mr. Hunter referred to the King of England.
- The Christian refers to the King of Kings in his confession.

The demons acknowledged Jesus

The New Testament has numerous references telling how demons recognized Jesus, called Him by name, yet still voiced their opposition to him. There is no sense in which they are accounted loyal to Him, nor He to them.

Matthew 8:29 The demons said to Him, “What do we have to do with You, Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?”

- They recognized Him. They were not loyal to Him.

- Theirs was not the Good Confession.

Peter's Denial

The opposite of “confession” is “denial.” Peter made, perhaps, the most noble confession of the Lord that is recorded in the gospels. He said to the Lord before them all, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matt. 16:15.

But when Jesus was on trial before His enemies, Peter was put to the test. In this instance he also denied the Lord,

Matt. 26:69 Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, and a certain servant-girl came to him and said, “You too were with Jesus the Galilean.” 70 **But he denied it before them all**, saying, “**I do not know what you are talking about.**” 71 And when he had gone out to the gateway, another *servant-girl* saw him and *said to those who were there, “This man was with Jesus of Nazareth.” 72 And again **he denied it with an oath, “I do not know the man.”** 73 And a little later the bystanders came up and said to Peter, “Surely you too are *one* of them; for the way you talk gives you away.” 74 Then he began to curse and swear, “**I do not know the man!**” And immediately a cock crowed.²⁷

- Peter's example at this point was denial, the opposite of confession.
- There are a lot of ways to say, “I don't know Him.”

Paul wrote in his second letter to Timothy,

²⁷ Emphasis mine, author.

2:11 It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; 12 If we endure, we shall also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.

To Peter's credit he repented, and afterward showed unwavering loyalty to Christ.

The Admonition to Timothy

Timothy was a Greek Christian who became a student, and close follower of the Apostle Paul. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul admonished the younger man to take a greater and firmer hold on his service to Christ. The admonition is taken in full recognition of the implications of the "good confession,"

1 Timothy 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate...

What was the "good confession" that Timothy made? The Apostle says that it was the same confession Jesus testified before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. John wrote in his gospel,

John 18:33 Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 18:34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?"

What He had done was lay the groundwork for a kingdom. He had already begun to call his disciples out from among the Jews. Shortly, they would begin to come from among the Gentiles. The issue they would face would be loyalty to Christ as they lived in a world dominated by their adversaries.

John 18:36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is My kingdom is not of this realm.”
37 Pilate therefore said to Him, “So You are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say correctly that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”

Do you hear His voice?

The chief priests who were present as accusers when Jesus was brought before Pilate evidently had no difficulty whatever understanding the reply Jesus made. They did not accept His declaration of kingship. But the testimony cannot be denied. It shouts down to us through almost two thousand years. The chief priests asked Pilate,

John 19:21 “Do not write, the King of the Jews, but **that he said**, 'I am king of the Jews...'”

And let us not forget what Pilate wrote on the *titulus*, the sign, they attached to His cross, “Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews.” John 19:19.

Jesus did not equivocate. [I.e., He did not use ambiguous words to conceal the truth or to protect Himself.] Neither does the testimony of the New Testament. The choice of confession is not as present day opponents of Christianity would have you to believe. They say, “If it's right for you, then it's right.”

Or, “If you believe He is the Messiah, then He is the Messiah.” They say the words in such a way as to make the actual facts seem unimportant, or the benefits obtained, completely subjective. They will tell you that the facts and benefits are of value only insofar as your personal feelings or interests are concerned.

Jesus did not grant such a preposterous choice to Pilate, nor to anyone else with whom He spoke. The Jewish authorities at that time understood the words of Jesus to mean that He claimed to be the “King of the Jews” with all its Messianic implications.

The Lord has tough words for people who deny Him. Read what He said in Revelation chapter 3,

Revelation 3:1 “And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, says this: ‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 ‘Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God. 3 ‘Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you. 4 ‘But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white; for they are worthy. 5 ‘He who overcomes shall thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels. 6 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’

Do you hear what He says?

The cult of Caesar.

In the First Century people paid divine honor to Caesar. They gave Caesar titles that should only be applied to the Eternal God, Jehovah. They worshipped Caesar. The Romans went so far as to make the cult of the Caesar a part of the law of the constitution. Simply put—the worship and adoration of Caesar had the force of law.

In the year 48 B.C. the town council of Ephesus, with other cities of the region, made an official inscription in which they spoke of Julius Caesar as “the god made manifest, offspring of Ares and Aphrodite, and common savior of human life.”²⁸ Such inscriptions are not rare. Archaeologists are able to cite so many examples from papyrus documents, potsherd and stone monuments that as Deissmann says, “If we try to get them all the net breaks.”²⁹

Besides the uses of the words “god” and “divine” to apply to the Caesars, the followers of Caesar also applied to him the term “lord,” in the Greek, *kyrios*.³⁰ This usage was parallel to the way Christians refer to Christ.

The evidence shows that shortly after Nero assumed the throne he was referred to as “the lord.” Deissman says that “the statistics are quite striking; everywhere, down to the remotest village, the officials called Nero lord. In the Acts, Festus the Procurator speaks of Nero simply as “the lord.” Acts 25:26.

²⁸ A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, p. 344.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

³⁰ Bauer, Walter, Gingrich, F. Wilbur, and Danker, Frederick W., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). κύριος.

The Conflict of Confessions

The question Polycarp's inquisitors put to him was, "What harm is there in saying 'Caesar is Lord', and offering incense, and saving yourself?"

This question that the Romans asked of Polycarp takes on serious meaning when we consider the instruction of Paul in Romans the Tenth Chapter, where he says,

Romans 10:9 ... that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; 10 for with the heart man believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.

Paul gave his admonition in direct opposition to Roman Law. His instructions were: confess loyalty to Christ, not to Caesar. Worship Christ not Caesar.

- A lot of people who read that letter made the proper confession and paid for it with their lives.
- So it is today in many ways. There are different ways to pay.
- There might be something for you to pay for your confession.
- Are you willing?

The issue in confession is among the oldest in the experience of man. Who is Lord? Who is Master? Who is god? Frequently the issue is accompanied by persecution. It finds its expression in the words of loyalty and belief. Who is your god? Is it God? Are you willing to speak it publicly, and then stand by your words? Are you willing to pay the price of your confession?

Loyalty to Whom?

The world resents greatly to be told that there is only one God, and only one Lord to serve. People who are ignorant of God's unique place believe that all gods should be honored, or at least, tolerated.

Loyalty of Christ to the believer.

In a verse of Matthew 10, Christ says,

“Every one therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven.” (10:32)

He reciprocates that loyalty. Indeed, never could you have a better friend. He told his disciples when giving them the Great Commission,

Matt. 28:19 “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I **am with you always**, even to the end of the age.”

Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play major league baseball. Robinson played Second Base for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He entered the league in 1947 when the country was still segregated by race. He encountered hostility and mistreatment. Even when playing at his home field in Brooklyn he encountered the hostility of the fans. Once he committed an error. The fans, who did not approve of him anyway, jeered and protested. Robinson could only stand at Second Base and hang his head. “Pee Wee” Reese who played Shortstop came over and stood beside him. Then Reese put his arm around Robinson’s shoulder. Standing together, they faced the crowd down. Robinson said later that the gesture saved his career.

- Why wouldn’t the Lord do the same for you?

In Hebrews the writer said in the 13th chapter,

Heb. 13:5 Let your character be free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you,"⁶ so that we confidently say,

"The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid.

What shall man do to me?"

Be loyal to Him because He is loyal to you.

Summary

Jesus made a public confession of Himself before Pontius Pilate. From the evidence it is clear that not only Pontius Pilate understood his statement, but the accusing Jews who were present understood the words also.

Persons who would become Christians are expected to make the same kind of confession, that is, The Good Confession. The Good Confession is a confession of a Person, namely, that Jesus Christ is Lord, the Son of God, the Messiah. It is a public statement that both implies, and requires, loyalty to Christ. Anyone who truly believes in Christ as Lord does not shrink back from the confession.

As it happened at Carthage on July 17, 180 AD, a Christian by the name of Speratus of the city of Scili in Numidia stood before the judgment seat of the Proconsul P. Vigellius Saturninus. The Proconsul commanded Speratus, "Swear by the genius [that is, by his spirit] of our lord the Emperor!" Speratus answered, "I know no imperium of this world,...I know my Lord, the King of kings, and Emperor of all nations."³¹

³¹ Deissmann, op. cit., p. 356.

With that confession Speratus identified himself with the servants of Christ. His voice speaks to us today.

Hear Speratus.

Conclusion

Be loyal to Christ and He will be loyal to you.

Make the Good Confession that Christ is your Lord, that He is God's Son come in the flesh, the Messiah of promise who suffered for you on Calvary's cross, but rose from the dead and sits now at God's right hand, exalted King of Kings, Lord of Lords.

Then you can say with the rest of us, "I am the King's man sir; I obey my Captain's orders."

Or as Ittai the Gittite said, "As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be."

And the Lord will say to you, "Go and pass over. Your name is in the Book of Life."

Fight the Good Fight

In October 1864, word came to President Abraham Lincoln of a Mrs. Bixby, a Boston widow, whose five sons had all been killed fighting in the Civil War. Lincoln later wrote his condolences:

Dear Madam,

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the republic they died to save.

I pray that our heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours very sincerely and respectfully,

Abraham Lincoln.

How beautiful the story would be if it ended here, but the story took an ironic turn just a few weeks after Lincoln sent the letter. No sooner had Mrs. Bixby received her letter when someone in the Whitehouse leaked it to the press. Pundits proclaimed it a masterpiece for some weeks afterward, that is, until a reporter went to the records of the Adjutant General and discovered that someone had given the President bad information.

Mrs. Bixby had not lost all five of her sons in battle. One was killed in action at Fredericksburg. One was killed in action at Petersburg. One was taken prisoner at Gettysburg and later exchanged and returned to his mother in good health. One deserted to the enemy. One deserted his post and fled the country.

If we reflect on this story for a moment I think we can see how like the Bixby family are those who embark upon the Christian life. It is a mixture of success and failure, honor and shame. Some of the Bixby sons fought honorably; others brought shame on themselves by their desertion. Yes, war is difficult. The experiences are painful and bitter. Yet the ones who kept their courage are the ones who afterward may enjoy the surcease of rest.

Paul the apostle had no illusions about the rigors he faced as a disciple of Christ. In his service to Christ he could expect little but discouragements and persecutions. Besides these, it was more than likely that he would receive punishments and death. Perhaps he knew what the Lord had said. Jesus had told his disciples, "... If they have called the head of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!"³²

As a warning to Timothy of what he might expect and how he should conduct himself Paul wrote,

1 Timothy 1:18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

- Fight the good fight.

³² Matthew 10:25.

- Keep faith and a good conscience.

Wiersbe wrote in his commentary,

It was not easy to serve God in pagan Ephesus, but Timothy was a man under orders, and he had to obey. The soldier's task is to "please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4), and not to please himself. Furthermore, Timothy was there by divine appointment: God had chosen him and sent him. It was this fact that could give him assurance in difficult days. If you are God's servant, called by the Spirit, obeying His will, then you can "stay with it" and finish the work. These assurances enabled Timothy to war the good warfare.³³

There is the story about the soldier in the Army of the Potomac who took part in the battle of Gettysburg. He belonged to the Sixth Corps, the group that made the famous march from Manchester to Gettysburg—a distance of thirty-four miles. He said that the march, with the clouds of dust, the perspiration, the blood of chafed limbs trickling down into his shoes, was the most difficult experience of his whole long war service.

It is sometimes harder to march than it is to fight. The test of endurance is the long march. You will meet many others who have gone part of the way and have turned back. You will have by your side many others who are ready to quit and go back with you—if you will only go with them. But always there are some who are going steadily forward and who have no idea of anything but enduring to the end.³⁴

³³ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (1 Ti 1:18–20). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

³⁴ C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, p. 110.

Fight the good fight.

Paul used military language to enforce his statement to Timothy. The “charge” Timothy had received was “an urgent command handed down from a superior officer” (1 Tim. 1:3). It was as if Timothy was a soldier and he was expected to serve as such. He was to take the field and march: “fight the good fight,” i.e., “to soldier as a good soldier.”³⁵

Facing the Enemy

During the Civil War there was a cavalry officer who rode a horse that had a fear of guns. Once, following a skirmish with the enemy, the tide of battle forced the officer to withdraw in haste. So he swung his horse around and rode toward his own lines.

At that moment an enemy soldier fired a shot that struck the horse on the rump. The effect this shot had on the officer we can only guess, but it greatly impressed the horse. Thereafter, the horse would not turn its rear to the enemy, but would only face in their direction. Besides motivating the horse, the trait induced by the unusual injury could have had a salutary effect on the officer's career, and greatly increased other people's estimate of his courage.

We do not know the outcome of this Civil War story, but we believe that there are Christians who need just such an impetus to keep their spiritual life going in the proper direction.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians,

³⁵ Liddell, H. (1996). A lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English lexicon (748). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. **στρατεύω**, f. σω, (στρατός) to serve in war, serve as a soldier, do military service, take the field, march.

Ephesians 6:13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

- "...having done all, stand firm."
- Do not turn your back, spiritually.
- Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.³⁶

In your striving against the adversary of Christ remember also what Paul admonished Timothy to keep in mind,

1 Timothy 6:7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

- "fight the good fight" leads naturally to keeping the confession.

³⁶ James 4:7.

- The Good Confession is similar to the Pledge of Allegiance.
- The Good Confession is a pledge of allegiance to Christ as Lord.

Keep faith

Keeping faith means that your confidence and trust in God does not waver even though the enemies of God threaten you with death. Stephen is the example of a Christian who kept faith even unto death. His example is that of a faithful and heroic disciple. Nevertheless, that outcome is not the same for every person who enters upon the road of Christian discipleship.

The scriptures contain numerous examples of people whose spiritual life went in the wrong direction. Among them is Asa, king of Judah.

In Second Chronicles the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapters the Bible tells us about Asa, king of Judah. The Ethiopians had attacked Judah with an army of a million men—outnumbering Asa's army by nearly two to one. They also had chariots.

Asa called upon Jehovah, and the Lord routed the Ethiopians before the armies of Judah and Benjamin. After the victory the prophet Azariah said to Asa,

2 Chronicles 15:2 “Listen to me Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you.”

If Asa had remembered the prophet's admonition he could have avoided the trouble that followed.

It happened in the 36th year of his reign that Asa had a war with the king of Israel whose name was

Baasha.³⁷ Instead of calling on the Lord to deliver him from that conflict, Asa took gold and silver from the treasuries of the Temple and sent it to Ben-hadad, king of Syria. Along with the gold and silver Asa asked the king of Syria to deliver him from Baasha; so, Ben-hadad delivered him.

But Hanani the seer came to see Asa. He said,

2 Chronicles 16:7 ... “Because you have relied on the king of Syria and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped out of your hand. 8 Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars.”

Asa rejected the prophet’s rebuke, and he became angry with the seer and put him in prison. At the same time Asa oppressed some of the people.

Next we read in verse 12 of chapter 16,

12 And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord but the physicians.

What we learn from Asa’s example is that he was a backslider. He began well, but ended trusting in outsiders rather than the Lord.

- He did not keep faith in the Lord.
- Others have.

³⁷ 2 Chronicles 16:1.

There is the story of a young Roman by the name of Adrian who was a member of the Praetorian Guard under Emperor Galerius Maximian. He had been a fanatic persecutor of the Christians, but the calmness and courage of those he put to the torture impressed him. Adrian, brave himself, admired bravery. In these Christians he saw heroism greater than any he had ever seen in battle.

It was the year 280 and Adrian was twenty-eight years old. His skill and daring had led to one promotion after another. Yet, he could not get over his admiration for these followers of Christ. One day he asked one of the Christians being tortured:

“What gives you such strength and joy in the midst of your sufferings?”

“Our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom we believe,” the martyr replied.

Immediately, Adrian made his decision. He faced the heathen judge and declared: “Put down my name among those to be tortured. I also shall become a Christian.”

For twenty-three years after his conversion Adrian suffered much, but he never flinched from his loyalty to Christ. In 303 he was killed at Nicomedia.

“Put down my name,” he said with true Christian courage.³⁸

Keep a good conscience

There is a story about a bishop who had preached a sermon on conscience one Sunday. The next day he sat at his desk opening mail. There were invitations,

³⁸ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (1404–1405). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

requests for aid, requests for prayers, circulars, and bills. After he had sorted through most of the mail he found a scrawled message which read: "All is known! Flee before you are exposed!" Panic stricken, the bishop packed everything he had and fled. Nobody ever discovered what he had done, and that included the writer of the note. Nevertheless, the note aroused the bishop's guilty conscience and he bolted from his contracted position to conceal himself in parts unknown.

As it was with the bishop so it was with our first parents. They had the original defiled consciences.

Adam and Eve after they had sinned hid themselves from the Lord. The Bible says in the book of Genesis that the Lord came down to the Garden of Eden, but Adam and Eve were not prepared for a visit.

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

From this original sin of Adam and Eve we learn that:

- The defiled conscience wants to hide from the Lord.
- The sinner feels naked; i.e., ashamed, embarrassed or guilty.
- The shame of nakedness arises from conscience, where the person knows the will of God, and understands that their behavior has been contrary to God's will.

The wounded conscience remains to accuse for many years. Such was the case with the brothers of Joseph.

The sons of Israel sold their brother Joseph to Ishmaelites and they in turn sold him into Egyptian slavery. Afterward the brothers lied to Jacob, Joseph's father, about what they had done. Years later when the famine in Palestine drove the brothers of Joseph down to Egypt to find food, Joseph tested his brothers.

Genesis 42:18 Now Joseph said to them on the third day, "Do this and live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for *the rest of you*, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die." And they did so. 21 Then they said to one another, "Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us." 22 And Reuben answered them, saying, "Did I not tell you, 'Do not sin against the boy'; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood."

- The conscience accuses and convicts the sinner much like Reuben accused his brothers.
- The brothers knew what they did was wrong.
- They did not keep a good conscience.

David violated God's law and offended his conscience. He sinned with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. Later, Nathan the prophet pointed out his sin to him. Conscience stricken, David wrote in the 51st Psalm,

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,

And renew a steadfast spirit within me.

11 Do not cast me away from Thy presence,

And do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me.

12 Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation,

And sustain me with a willing spirit.

13 *Then I* will teach transgressors Thy ways,

And sinners will be converted to Thee.

- David saw his behavior in relation to God's law and was ashamed. He appealed to God to cleanse his heart.

The consequences of rejection

1 Timothy 1:19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

Suffer shipwreck of faith

C.E. Macartney told a story about a shipwreck off the coast of England many years ago. He said, on the stormy southwest coast of England at Bottreaux there is a church whose towers are silent. No bells ring for the living or toll for the dead. There is a legend that a ship was once beating its way along that shore, having on board bells that were designed for this church building. A sailor lad, heard the neighboring bells of Tintagel sounding over the sea, and he thanked God for the favor that would soon bring them safely to port.

But the Skipper was a godless man, and he told the young sailor to thank the steersman, the good ship, and the ready sail. As if in answer to his blasphemy, the sea rose and the waves dashed the ship and its godless master on the rocks. Now they say that the bells which went down with that ship may be heard above the surge of the ocean as it breaks on the iron cliffs, peeling out

the invitation of the Church, the invitation of God, the coming of death, and after death the judgment.³⁹

Paul Kept the Faith

Paul kept the faith as an apostle of Christ. He was therefore qualified to give this advice:

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Paul is the example of an apostle who fought the good fight of faith, and who could confidently look to his reward. And Paul would readily tell you that his confidence rested not on his own strength, but on the strength of Christ.

As we struggle to live in this age of the world we are at times overwhelmed by the challenges we face. It would be easy to surrender to the tide of ungodliness, but according to the examples provided in the scriptures we must keep faith and a good conscience as we face the enemy. For our confidence rests not on our own abilities, but upon the ability of Christ, upon His word of promise, and upon His completed work of redemption. It is as the writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 10:19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since *we have* a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us

³⁹ C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, p. 302c.

draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled *clean* from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

The old Russian army had a tradition that when a sentinel had been posted, he could be relieved only by the officer who had posted him, or by the czar himself. During the First World War there was the story of a Russian soldier who was posted as a sentinel in one of the areas of battle. The officer who posted him was killed in the battle. Afterward, the soldier refused to leave his post until an order came from the czar himself.⁴⁰

If you have been posted as a sentinel for Christ you must not abandon your post. Some of us might have to wait until the Lord Himself issues the order, but until then—serve we must.

Remember the story of the Greek warrior whose legs were twisted by injury and disease. A day came when he struggled to reach the front line so that he could face the enemy. When at first the other warriors saw him they cheered, but when they saw his legs they laughed. He silenced their voices when he said, “I came to fight, not to run.”

Fight the good fight of faith.

Don't run.

⁴⁰ C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, p. 107.

Work Out Your Salvation

In the Old Testament book of First Samuel the Bible tells the story of how Samuel the prophet went to Bethlehem, ostensibly to offer a sacrifice, but in reality to select a king to replace Saul. Samuel came to the family of Jesse and examined his sons to see if one of these would become the new king.

The Bible says that,

1 Samuel 16:6 When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

Samuel thought that Eliab was surely the new king, but he was mistaken. God had already decided that there was no king in Eliab. After that Jesse had six more of his sons pass before Samuel, but the Lord rejected each of them as unfit to become king. Then Samuel asked, "Is this all the children?" And Jesse answered, "There remains the youngest, but he is tending the sheep."

It was not until Samuel saw David, the youngest of the sons of Jesse, that the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." And so, Samuel the prophet anointed David as king of Israel.

Samuel had not been able to see a king in any of the sons of Jesse, but God did. David's father, Jesse, saw David as a shepherd of his sheep, but God saw him as the king of Israel.

God had placed within David the ability to become a king. It only had to be identified and brought out. And if we could ask David how he did it he would be the first to tell us that what good he did as king he did so by God working through him and in him.

In a similar way God has placed within the Christian the capability to excel in the Christian calling. Paul wrote to the Philippians,

Philippians 2:12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

Gospel preachers have long emphasized the need to “work out” salvation, in showing from the Bible that man is not wholly passive in his own salvation. Yet familiarity with this text does not necessarily guarantee its understanding, nor necessarily its chief point in context.

Here we observe two misuses of the passage that are often made:

Some believe “work out your salvation” to mean, “Do whatever you please,” as though God is telling his people to “work out” or invent their own salvation as it pleases them individually. This is not what Paul is saying.

Others say “work out your salvation” means: “Work hard enough and God will give you salvation as a reward.” This is directly contradictory to the teaching of scripture that salvation is of grace, not merit.

In this context, before he mentions the “work out your own salvation,” Paul urges his readers to adopt the humility of Christ.

Philippians 2:5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So then “work out”⁴¹ has this significance: it means to “bring about,” “effect,” “do.”⁴² But the doing is in submission to God’s will.

The word translated “work out” in Philippians 2:12 and in numerous other New Testament passages means to do the specified action which produces what by nature is inherent in something. Think of it this way: is there a king in this young man? Then he must submit to the rigors of kingship to bring it out. Is there a Christian in

⁴¹ Vine. Greek: *katergazomai*. *κατεργάζομαι*.

⁴² Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : Updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc. **κατεργάζομαι** **katergazomai**; from 2596 and 2038b; *to work out*:—accomplished(1), brings about(2), carried(1), committed(1), committing(1), does(1), doing(4), done(1), effecting(1), performed(1), prepared(1), produced(2), produces(2), producing(2), work(1)

this person, then they must submit to the rigors of being a Christian to make the characteristic evident.

For example, wrath is inherent in law. It is in the nature of law to accuse, and if it is given full course, then it always result in the imposition of the penalty upon the accused for its violation; i.e., wrath.

Patience is inherent in tribulation. Tribulation includes the ordeals of trial and suffering. Seldom is tribulation a brief experience. Sometimes, the period of testing lasts for years—or even a lifetime. But the reward of patience follows for the person who endures the pain. So tribulation, given the right course, always results in patience.

Thanksgiving is inherent in Christians liberality; liberality, given full course, results in thanksgiving to God. On the other hand, there is no divine righteousness inherent in man's wrath; such wrath may work itself out completely and no divine righteousness will come forth. It simply is not there to begin with.

Championship racehorses seldom if ever appear on the racetrack unless they possess the attributes of a winner. Bold Ruler was an American Thoroughbred Hall of Fame racehorse who won the 1957 Preakness Stakes. He became the sire of two other Hall of Famers, Secretariat and Gamely. Secretariat rose to be one of the greatest thoroughbred racehorses of all time because of three things: the physical ability was in him; he had quality trainers; and he had riders who knew how to get out of him what God had put into him.⁴³

In Philippians Paul is saying that “salvation” is inherently in the one who is joined to Christ, but it must be worked out. Unless it is inherently in one, mere “working” will not produce the salvation. God must put

⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretariat_28horse.

it there first. And even in the case of the one in Christ, salvation comes to light only as it is “worked out.”

Paul said work out “your” salvation. The word “your” is plural; so, Paul is addressing the whole church.⁴⁴ Vine says of the meaning of the word “salvation” in this passage that it is,

...the present experience of God’s power to deliver from the bondage of sin, e.g., Phil. 2:12, where the special, though not the entire, reference is to the maintenance of peace and harmony; 1 Pet. 1:9; this present experience on the part of believers is virtually equivalent to sanctification; for this purpose, God is able to make them wise, 2 Tim. 3:15; they are not to neglect it, Heb. 2:3;⁴⁵

Jesus has powerfully accomplished our salvation, but he will not work out your salvation—in this sense—for you. There is an individual responsibility involved in this. Think of this in terms of the talents that the Lord delivered to His servants. First, they were His servants; second, He delivered talents to them that He expected them to multiply in His service. Don’t be like the one who buried his talent.

The Interpreter’s Bible says this,

⁴⁴ Utlely, R. J. (1997). *Vol. Volume 8: Paul Bound, the Gospel Unbound: Letters from Prison (Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon, then later, Philipians)*. Study Guide Commentary Series (183). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International. **“work out your salvation”** This is a mathematical term used of a problem brought to its conclusion. Its form is present middle (deponent) imperative plural.

⁴⁵ Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). Vol. 2: Vine’s Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words (316). Old Tappan NJ: Revell. σωτηρία: salvation.

Everything would be simple if we could neatly assign a certain area to God's operation, and another to the work we ourselves must do; but such a clear-cut division would be like trying to separate the influence of a good mother from the willing response of her son (or daughter). The mother both invites it and creates it, while the son also wills it.

All of Paul's letters center around his discovery of this twofold working of the will of man and the will of God. Like all his forebears, and multitudes of his successors, he first thought of morality as rules of behavior, or laws imposed on us by a moral ruler who required obedience and administered punishment to those who disobeyed. Then it dawned on him in a conversion that God is always trying to give us his life, his spirit, if we would only put self out of the way and make room. God's so called requirements are simply the demands of our own nature, which he created to receive his spirit and be transformed by it.⁴⁶

Pythagoras, the Greek mathematician said, "In this theater of man's life, it is reserved only for God—and angels to be lookers on.

Paul was a wonderful apostle and preacher, but even he could not work out the salvation of the Philippians for them. Moreover, there is in this passage a glimpse of regeneration, which was the same for the Philippians as it is for every church—and severally, all the members of the church.

Paul elaborates on this to Titus, where in the Third Chapter he said,

⁴⁶ Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 11, p. 55.

Titus 3:3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. 4 But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, 5 He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life.

The idea in regeneration and renewal is that God has entered upon a transformation of character for the subject—you and me—with the result that the Christian abandons his old self and adopts the new, wherein through instruction and fellowship he “works out” the new that God has intended to bring about. The change embraces both a moral renewal and the appearance of the Christian character, and that becomes evident through time.⁴⁷

So, Paul is not speaking of initial salvation but the final result. And that result is hard. It involves obedience when obedience is difficult. Think of the obedience of Jesus,

⁴⁷ *Vol. 1: Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (688). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. 2. Tt. 3:5: διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου. Here παλιγγενεσία is the result of baptism and parallel to ἀνακαίνωσις. It does not mean only attainment to a new life with the end of the old life, nor does it mean only moral renewal; it embraces both.

Heb. 5:7-9 In the days of his flesh, when he offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and who was heard because of his piety, although he was a son, he learned obedience from the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation;

The story is told of an English lad who was left to care for the land while his father was away. He was driven to the gate one day by the sound of approaching horses.

The riders drew their mounts up to the gate and the gentleman who headed the hunting party commanded the lad to open the gate.

“I’m. Sorry sir,” the boy answered, but my father has told me to say that you must not hunt on his grounds.”

The man said, “Do you know who I am?”

“No, sir,” the boy answered.

“I am the Duke of Wellington.”

The boy (in deference to the man's rank) took off his cap, but he did not open the gate. “The Duke of Wellington,” he said, “Will not ask me to disobey my father's orders.”

With a deliberate slowness the Duke took off his hat and smiled. He said, “I honor the lad who is faithful to his duty,” and with that, the duke wheeled his party around and rode away.⁴⁸

The lad knew the rule, and he obeyed his father.

⁴⁸ Brands, Jacob M., *The Speaker's Desk book of Quips, Quotes, and Anecdotes*, p. 113.

The lad had the courage to do his duty. He maintained respect both for the Duke of Wellington and for his father.

Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

The Greek here has “phobos” and “tromos,” These are expressive sounds even in the ear that understands English.

Some other passages illustrate this pair of words.

Genesis 9:2 uses these two words of the attitude and relationship of animals toward man (Greek Old Testament). “And fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand and they are given.”

Exodus uses these two words of the attitude of the Canaanites toward Israel (Greek Old Testament).

Exodus 15:16 “Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone; Until Your people pass over, O Lord, Until the people pass over whom You have purchased.

Paul wrote these words to the Corinthians' about their attitude and relationship toward Titus,

2 Cor. 7:15 His affection abounds all the more toward you, as he remembers the obedience of you all, how you received him with fear and trembling.

There is the story about two who should have been afraid but weren't.

In Australia two magpies were sitting opposite each other on parallel high voltage wires. Eleven thousand volts coursed through those wires. It was apparent from what followed that the magpies kissed. Immediately,

amid bumping circuit breakers and smoking wires, lights went out for miles around. They found the birds on the ground beneath the wires, their beaks welded together.

They should have feared the forces that raged so near underfoot, but they did not. They were ignorant and could not possibly understand.

People should be afraid and are not. They are like the passengers who rode the Titanic on its maiden voyage in April, 1912. They thought the Titanic could not sink. A ship that passed the Titanic that night could hear the music of the bands playing, the sounds of gaiety as the vessel went to her doom. The passengers were not afraid. Even after the ship struck the iceberg, they would not believe the ship could sink, and they would not lower the lifeboats. Fifteen hundred people lost their lives because officers who should have feared the North Atlantic did not.

How many souls will be lost because they should have feared God but did not?

Ephesians 6:5 Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ...

This is “fear and trembling” in the sense of a reverential respect. It may be observed even to the extent of physical shaking—because of a particular relationship established by God.

It is a circumstance to be taken most seriously. Because God ordained the relation of man as superior to the animal kingdom animals have “fear and trembling” toward man. Because God ordained that the Israelites possess the land of Canaan, its inhabitant had “fear and trembling” toward the Israelites. Because a Christian slave was to serve his master “as to Christ,” his relationship toward the master was with “fear and trembling.” Because the Corinthians realized that Titus

came as Paul's personal representative they received him with "fear and trembling."

In our text, Christians are to "work out" their own salvation "with fear and trembling" precisely because Christ is at God's right hand and Christians are his people.

It is an attitude of serious reverence in view of the relationship which exists,

For it is God who works in you.

Earl Weaver was the manager of the Baltimore Orioles baseball team. (1968–1982; 1985–1986). He had a star player named Reggie Jackson.

Weaver had a rule that no one could steal a base unless the coach gave him the sign. The rule bothered Jackson because he thought he knew the pitchers and catchers well enough to judge who he could and could not steal a base from. To prove he was right he decided once during a game to steal without the signal from the coach.

He got a good lead off first base then easily beat the pitcher's throw to second base. As he shook the dirt off his uniform, Jackson smiled, delighted that he had proved himself to the manager.

Later Weaver took Jackson aside and explained why he hadn't given the signal to steal the base. First, the next batter was Lee May—his best power hitter behind Jackson. When Jackson stole second, first base was left open, so the other team walked May intentionally, taking the bat out of his hands.

Second, the following batter was weak against this pitcher (the pitcher could strike him out), so Weaver was forced to send in a pinch hitter to try to drive in the base runners. Third, that left Weaver without batting strength on the bench to be used later in the game when he needed it.

The problem with Jackson was that he only saw the problem of beating the pitcher and the catcher. He was only seeing the game from his perspective. The manager, Earl Weaver, was watching the whole game.

In life there is a bigger picture. We may or may not see it. Reggie Jackson didn't see it in the baseball game.

Some Christians don't see their part in God's greater scheme.

Each of us has a personal responsibility in our Christian walk, but we must remember that God is looking out for the bigger picture.

The Greek word translated "works in" is literally "energizes." God is the one empowering the Christian to "work out" his own salvation. This is additional cause for fear and trembling.

In his letter to the Romans Paul used a similar idea but this time concerning sin.⁴⁹ In that letter "sin" is the energizing force, "working in" the man and resulting in his death (the same Greek word found in Philippians 2). In Philippians, God is the energizing force, "working in" the man and resulting in his "working out" salvation.

The Christian, therefore, is to "work out" what God "works in." This places him, not in an independent position of autonomous responsibility, but dependently responsible as God's instrument and Christ's servant.

When Paul wrote "both to will and to do," he meant literally, "both desiring and performing."

In Romans Chapter 7 the man in bondage to sin may have an honest desire to do God's will, yet lack the strength to carry out that intention. (the Revised

⁴⁹ Romans 7:5.

Standard version there has: “I can will what is right, but I cannot do it.”⁵⁰

Alcoholics anonymous has rediscovered the truth that the working of God begins when self-sufficiency reaches the end of its rope. Victims of drink find a renovation of life only at the point where the weakness of their human will becomes truly desperate. So long as they think they have everything under control they remain incurable. We do not have to be confined drunkards to recognize certain self-sufficient dispositions which today, make many persons, perhaps including ourselves, religiously unreceptive.⁵¹

The Christian who allows God to “work in” him finds that God energizes him both “to will” and “to do.” The man is no stronger in his own flesh than before; he has stopped trusting his own strength and has allowed God to “work in” and “energize” him.

God does this for His good pleasure. As the scripture says of Jesus,

Matt. 3:17; 17:5 “and behold, a voice out of the heavens, saying, ‘this is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased. While he was still speaking, behold a bright cloud overshadowed them; and behold, a voice out of the cloud saying, ‘this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; hear him! “

God was “well pleased” (the verb form of our word) with Christ. But with the rebellious Israelites He was not pleased,

⁵⁰ Romans 7:18.

⁵¹ Interpreter's Bible, vol 11, p. 52

1 Cor. 10:5 “Nevertheless, with most of them
God was not well pleased; for they were laid
low in the wilderness.”

God was not “well pleased' with many in Israel, and
they perished.

Paul prays that God will fulfill his “good pleasure”
in the Thessalonian saints.

“Good pleasure” is a way of saying “kind desires,”
both in the affectionate motivating force and in the
beneficent end in view. Frequently the term has to do
with salvation. The Christian is involved in God's
purpose, as regards his own salvation and that of others.

God will energize the Christian to desire and
perform what he intends in this regard.

At Adak, Alaska in March 1974, two Navy men
were so motivated to do the will of the Lord that they
asked for and were assisted in uniting with their Lord in
baptism in the icy waters of the Bering Sea.⁵²

There is obedience and there is obedience in
difficult circumstances.

Because Christ (who is God's man, par excellence)
is now exalted Lord in heaven, the one who is in Him
has a salvation which is inherent in his union with
Christ. The Christian is to “work out” that salvation,
bringing to light what is there by God's own decree.

He is to do it individually, because of this
relationship and circumstance, and because God Himself
energizes the Christian.

⁵² Paul Harvey, March 11, 1974.

He is to act with great reverence and seriousness, that is, with “fear and trembling.” In this way he can be used by God for His own purposes of salvation.

He will become an agent of God's “good pleasure,” as God “works in” the Christian “to will” or desire what is God's purpose and “to do” or carry out that purpose in the strength which God supplies.

Victory Over Sin

Macartney told of a Scottish writer who traveled with a deer hunter to the northwest coast of Scotland. In the hills of Quoich they sat down to rest. The writer became entranced with the lovely view of the islands and the sea, and said to the hunter, “A man might sit here forever, and in peace.”

The hunter answered, “You know the old and true word of our race: ‘Though a man have no foeman without, within there is always one.’”

Indeed, there is always a foeman within, and each soul has its own ladder down to hell.⁵³

Paul wrote to the Romans,

Romans 7:18 For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. 19 For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. 20 But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. 21 **I** find then the principle that evil is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

People of all walks of life frequently find themselves in conflict with urges to engage in bad behavior, while conscience attempts to restrain. In many cases it is as the Lord said, “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”⁵⁴ And so the struggle rages from day to day. The flesh has its urges, but the spirit resists, and more often than not, the flesh wins the contest.

⁵³ C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*,” p. 331.

⁵⁴ Matthew 26:41.

A man cannot defeat sin with his own strength, even though he may want to resist. And while there are some who want to escape sin and its consequences there are large numbers whose spirits are eager to sin. I am not speaking to the latter group. The ungodly and the unregenerate must first learn repentance.⁵⁵ But there are others who despair of ever achieving that purity of character that God requires. Many of these give up the struggle because they see it as something too great for them.

Perhaps it is.

The truth is men need a savior because they are sinners. As Paul wrote to the Romans,

Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short
of the glory of God,

And in the same letter,

Romans 3:10,

“THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN
ONE;

11 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,
THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;

12 ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER
THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS;

THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD,
THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

⁵⁵ Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). *Vol. 2: Vine's Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (281). Old Tappan NJ: Revell. *μετάνοια* : In the N.T. the subject chiefly has reference to repentance from sin, and this change of mind involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God. The parable of the prodigal son is an outstanding illustration of this.

Yet God is merciful. He is not willing for any to perish. But He wants all to come to repentance.⁵⁶ To accomplish this purpose God sent His Son.

The religion of Jesus Christ is a religion of reconciliation—God brings men back to Himself through the work of His Son. Even though man is a slave to sin God has purposed to set him free from his bondage. And not just set him free, but the ultimate aim of God’s work is the transformation of man into the likeness of God Himself, or of the Son which is to say the same thing, inasmuch as the Son is the express image of the Father. As Peter wrote,

1 Peter 1:14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; 16 because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Therefore, God intends that man become holy in all respects. This means that God intends for man to reform his behavior. The way God accomplishes this is no longer a mystery.

In the story of the *Mutiny on the Bounty* the crew overthrew the rule of Captain Bligh and later sank their ship off Pitcairn Island in the Pacific Ocean. Nine mutineers with six native men and twelve Tahitian women put ashore on Pitcairn Island in 1790. One sailor began distilling alcohol, and soon the little colony plunged into debauchery and vice.

Ten years later, only one white man survived, surrounded by native women and a brood of children. In an old chest from the *Bounty*, this sailor found a Bible. He began to read it and then to teach it to the others. The result was that his own life and ultimately the lives of all

⁵⁶ 2 Peter 3:9.

those in the colony were changed. Discovered in 1808 by the *USS Topas*, Pitcairn had become a prosperous community with no jail, no whisky, no crime, and no laziness.⁵⁷

Historians today dispute many of the details of the story of the survivors of the mutiny on the *Bounty*. Later events indicate that a few of the descendents succumbed to temptation and returned to vice and corruption. Nevertheless, there were some inhabitants of Pitcairn Island who represented the transforming power of the word of God. The word of God is able to change hearts, strengthen the feeble spirits and turn sinners into upright souls eager to do God's will.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his second letter,

2 Cor 3:18 But we all, with unveiled face,
beholding as in a mirror the glory of the
Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from glory to glory, just as from the
Lord, the Spirit.

And to the Romans,

Romans 8:29 For those whom He foreknew, He
also predestined *to become* conformed to the
image of His Son, so that He would be the
firstborn among many brethren;

This being the case, every child of God should earnestly seek the likeness of Christ and the transformation of character that God—by the Spirit—makes possible. So, if you would be transformed in character, if you would live godly in the present age then study the Bible and follow its precepts.

⁵⁷ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times*. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

Regrettably, many professing Christians are greatly concerned about forgiveness of their sins,⁵⁸ but care little about biblical renovation of character.⁵⁹ In truth, we should earnestly pursue both. We find forgiveness of sins in Christ, and then in that relationship it becomes important to be separated from evil things and evil ways. To keep, or to adopt, bad practices after becoming a Christian is to insult the Spirit of grace.⁶⁰ The serious Christian earnestly pursues godliness through his obedience to the word of God.

For the godly person, it is wise always to remember that the manner in which this purifying of character takes

⁵⁸ Justification: δικαίωσις, denotes the act of pronouncing righteous, justification, acquittal; In the New Testament means to be declared righteous; acquitted of the guilt of sins.

⁵⁹ Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). *Vol. 2: Vine's Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (ἁγιασμός, (38)), sanctification, is used of (a) separation to God, 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2; (b) the course of life befitting those so separated, 1Thess. 4:3, 4, 7; Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 12:14.¶ "Sanctification is that relationship with God into which men enter by faith in Christ, Acts 26:18; 1 Cor. 6:11, and to which their sole title is the death of Christ, Eph. 5:25, 26; Col. 1:22; Heb. 10:10, 29; 13:12. "Sanctification is also used in N.T. of the separation of the believer from evil things and ways. This sanctification is God's will for the believer, 1 Thess. 4:3, and His purpose in calling him by the gospel, ver. 7; it must be learned from God, ver. 4, as He teaches it by His Word, John 17:17, 19; cp. Ps. 17:4; 119:9, and it must be pursued by the believer, earnestly and undeviatingly, 1 Tim. 2:15; Heb. 12:14. For the holy character, *hagiōsunē*, 1 Thess. 3:13, is not vicarious, i.e., it cannot be transferred or imputed, it is an individual possession, built up, little by little, as the result of obedience to the Word of God, and of following the example of Christ, Matt. 11:29; John 13:15; Eph. 4:20; Phil. 2:5, in the power of the Holy Spirit, Rom. 8:13; Eph. 3:16.

⁶⁰ Hebrews 10:28.

place is not attributable to man's own strength or power, but is as much a part of the working of God as forgiveness of sins is in the first place.

In opposition to this idea, the Jewish rabbis taught that man could attain purity through study and observance of the Law. Some of the *pietists* who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees went to the extreme in this regard. The *pietists* would, for example,

...bring every day a trespass-offering, in case he had committed some offence of which he was doubtful. How far the punctiliousness of that class, in observing the laws of Levitical purity, would go, may be gathered from a Rabbi, who would not allow his son to remain in the room while he was in the hands of the surgeon, lest he might be defiled by contact with the amputated limb, which, of course, was thenceforth dead. Another *chasid* went so far in his zeal for Sabbath observance, that he would not build up again his house because he had thought about it on the Sabbath;⁶¹

Edersheim tells an anecdote about rabbinical purity during the time of Christ,

Thus, we read of a discussion in the heavenly Academy on the subject of purity, when Rabbah was summoned to heaven by death, although this required a miracle, since he was constantly engaged in sacred study. Shocking to write, it needed the authority of Rabbah to attest the

⁶¹ Edersheim, A. (2003). *Sketches of Jewish social life in the days of Christ* (215). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

correctness of the Almighty's statement on the Halakhic question discussed.⁶²

Incredibly, the rabbis thought they could correct the Almighty in matters of purity! Thus they abandoned the idea of God's working in the matter of purification and instead adopted their own.

Reality is quite the opposite.

Spartacus the Thracian was one of the most spirited and energetic men ever to live. He was also a slave. He worked almost all his life as a slave to his Roman masters. The Romans trained him as a gladiator and would have sacrificed him in the arena, but he led a revolt of the slaves and nearly escaped the Empire.

It was a noble struggle. For a brief time Spartacus and his followers tasted the sweetness of freedom, but his allies betrayed him and he died—crucified with his fellow slaves by the Romans he could not defeat. The power of Rome crushed his army of rabble as swords always eradicate clubs.

As was the struggle of Spartacus with the power of Rome, so is the struggle of man with the power of Satan and of sin. Alone, no matter how spirited the fight, no matter how noble our intentions, we must be defeated.

We need a champion—someone stronger than Satan. It is as Paul wrote to the Romans,

Romans 7:24 Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

⁶² Edersheim, A. (1896). *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*. Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. A reference to the Talmudic tractate, Babha Metsia, the 2nd.

In the passage from Romans Chapter 7 Paul is likely describing someone—either himself, or someone else—who desires to please God, but seeks to do it by human effort.

He points out that a strong desire to do God’s pleasure may nevertheless be thwarted by the strength of sin which prevents the doing of what is right.⁶³

The law of God is good and beneficial, but law is not the answer to this problem. Law defines sin and informs the conscience about right and wrong. Both of these are desirable, and even necessary. As Paul said,

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be! On the contrary, I would not have come to know sin except through the Law; for I would not have known about coveting if the Law had not said, “YOU SHALL NOT COVET.”

Law teaches us about right and wrong, condemning the person who falls short of it, but law cannot enable a person to do what is right or keep him from doing what is wrong.⁶⁴ It is similar to the difference between outward constraint and inward motivation where the constraint is law and the inward motivation is Spirit driven love of God and the desire to be Christlike.

Do not think, as some do, that behavior is irrelevant because we are under grace. The grace of God should never be construed as permission to sin.^{65 66}

⁶³ Romans 7:18-22.

⁶⁴ Romans 7:7-12; 14-16.

⁶⁵ Romans 6:1-7; 6:15.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Vine, W., & Bruce, F. The phrase *mē genoito*, lit., ‘let it not be’ (*mē*, negative, and *ginomai*, to become), is idiomatically translated “God forbid” in Luke 20:16; Rom. 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11; 1 Cor. 6:15; Gal.

For example, Prohibition in the United States was a national ban on the sale, production, and transportation of alcohol in place from 1920 to 1933. It did nothing to reform alcoholics. The law only described an offense. It is likely that the law prevented some people from getting alcohol and in that way limited some consumption. But it could not cause the desire to drink alcohol to go away. Others, victimized by the perversity of sin, began to drink alcohol merely because it was against the law. Some could argue that Prohibition made matters worse.

For the renovation of man God provided another method apart from law.

Sin has control over the natural man, holding him in bondage against his own fleshly desires until a stronger master takes control. Paul can, thus, say, "It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwells in me."⁶⁷

The man who wants to please God, but is in bondage to sin, can only cry out in frustration and despair.⁶⁸ This is true because the flesh is weak.⁶⁹

All of this God has taken in to account, and through His infinite wisdom, mercy and grace He has provided the solution in Christ.

Romans 8:1 Therefore there is now no
condemnation for those who are in Christ
Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in
Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of

2:17; 3:21, and in the A.V. of 6:14; here the R.V. has "far be it from me (to glory)," which the American R.V. uses in the O.T. In Paul's Epistles it is almost entirely used to express the Apostle's repudiation of an inference which he apprehends may be drawn from his argument.

⁶⁷ Romans 7:17.

⁶⁸ Romans 7:22-24.

⁶⁹ Romans 8:3.

sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, ^bweak as it was through the flesh, God *did*: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and *as an offering* for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

- What the Law could not do...God did

Freedom from the bondage to sin may be found in Jesus Christ. In Christ the strangle-hold that sin has on a man is broken and through Christ his good desires may actually reach fulfillment in life.⁷⁰

Being “made free from sin” means that the Christian is not under further obligation to serve sin. He no longer has to do Satan’s will. He is free to serve God. This is not to say that he will never again willingly yield to sin.

William Jennings Bryan used to tell of a man in his home town in Illinois who had been the victim of alcohol. A day came when he reformed, signed the pledge, and apparently was delivered out of his evil habit. But when he rode into town he continued to hitch his horse to the rail that stood in front of the tavern. Not long afterward he found himself inside the tavern, a glass of whiskey in his hand, and once again a drunkard. He had allowed his old habit to return.

A life of holiness calls for two constant and continual acts of will on the part of the Christian. If either is missing, holiness will not result. If both are present (and so long as both are present) holiness will be the result as surely as “fruit” is found on a living and healthy tree. First, the Christian must reckon himself to be one with Christ, and therefore dead to sin but alive to

⁷⁰ Romans 7:25; 8:2-4.

God.⁷¹ Second, he must yield himself to God, and his members as instruments of righteousness.⁷²

There is a story about an 18th Century German artist whose name was Stenberg. One day as he was walking through the market place of his home town the face of a dancing gypsy girl attracted him. He invited her to come to his studio and sit for him. With her as a model he painted his “Dancing Gypsy Girl.”

The girl was much taken with what she saw in the artist’s studio, and watched him with great interest as he worked on a painting of the Crucifixion. One day she said to Stenberg, “He must have been a very bad man to have been nailed to the cross like that.”

“No,” Stenberg answered. “He was a good man. The best man who ever lived. Indeed, he died for all men.”

“Did he die for you?” the girl asked.

Stenberg had no answer, but he began to think about her question. Did He truly die for him? Stenberg was not a Christian and he could not say that Christ had.

One day he chanced to go to a meeting of the Reformers. They opened the Scriptures to him, and they showed him the way of salvation. This brought him to Christ. Afterward, he returned to his studio to finish the painting of the Crucifixion, but this time he worked not only with the skill of the artist, but with the love that comes from a believing heart. They hung Stenberg’s finished painting of the Crucifixion in the gallery at Dusseldorf.

A day came when a young German, a nobleman and a count, wandered through the gallery and paused before

⁷¹ Romans 6:11.

⁷² Romans 6:13.

Stenberg's "Crucifixion." The painting moved him greatly, as did the words the artist had written under it: "This I did for thee; what hast thou done for Me?"

Stenberg had been influenced by Christ, and now the count was greatly influenced by Stenberg's work. The count was Nicholas Zinzendorf. Afterward Zinzendorf became a religious and social reformer in Europe, attempting to turn an indifferent church back to the historical Christ.⁷³

Yield to God, and your members as instruments of righteousness.

Sin's power and authority are gone so far as the Christian is concerned. But sin is always a willing master if the Christian himself chooses to serve sin rather than God and righteousness. Paul's point is that the one joined to Christ is not under obligation to serve sin. He does not have to sin. He may serve God instead. But he has to reckon this to be the case and then yield to God's will with his body.

This is the way to the victory over sin.

In Romans, Paul speaks of the final result of serving God, but the context involves a number of contrasts. The unregenerate attempts to live in service to the flesh with the result that he lives in service to sin. In this condition he is free from righteousness.⁷⁴ The fruit of that manner of life is shameful and the end is death.⁷⁵ Death is the natural outcome of a life of sin as Paul says, "the wages" of sin is death.⁷⁶

⁷³ C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, p. 81, 82.

⁷⁴ Romans 6:20.

⁷⁵ Romans 6:21, 23.

⁷⁶ Romans 6:23.

However, serving God has an entirely different outcome: Christ sets one free from sin to become a servant of God. In this service he is freed from sin, and fruit borne by his new life is holiness. The end of this service is everlasting life, as Paul says, "...the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."⁷⁷

Because of the work of Christ and His personal victory over Satan, one joined to Him may also enjoy freedom from sin and a life pleasing to God. The Christian has been made free from sin. He does not have an obligation to serve it any longer. He is now a servant of God, and owes Him full allegiance. This means that he may live a daily life of holiness, by "reckoning" and "yielding." And it means that he looks forward to eternal life in a redeemed body after the Resurrection.

Paul wrote this to the Ephesians,

Ephesians 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. **20** Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, 21 to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

⁷⁷ Romans 6:18-23.

Paul before Agrippa and Festus

To please the Jewish authorities, the Roman procurator, Antonius Felix, imprisoned the Apostle Paul at Caesarea for two years. When Porcius Festus succeeded Felix as procurator of Judea, in about 60 AD, Festus again heard the charges brought against Paul.

In those days Judea was in a great unrest. As Josephus puts it,

Now, when these were quieted, it happened, as it does in a diseased body, that another part was subject to an inflammation; for a company of deceivers and robbers got together, and persuaded the Jews to revolt, and exhorted them to assert their liberty, inflicting death on those that continued in obedience to the Roman government, and saying, that such as willingly chose slavery ought to be forced from such their desired inclinations; for they parted themselves into different bodies, and lay in wait up and down the country, and plundered the houses of the great men, and slew the men themselves, and set the villages on fire; and this till all Judea was filled with the effects of their madness. And thus the flame was every day more and more blown up, till it came to a direct war.⁷⁸

The land was seething with robbers and deceivers. So the Romans had imprisoned many, and not a few had died. Paul was in no small company to be arrested and prosecuted by the authorities. To make matters worse, the Jews hounded him, coming down from Jerusalem, bringing many and serious charges against him.”⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Josephus, F., & Whiston, W. (1987). *The works of Josephus: Complete and unabridged*. Peabody: Hendrickson.

⁷⁹ Acts 25:7.

The Pulpit Commentary says concerning this incident,

Paul said in his own defense, “I have committed no offense either against the law of the Jews or against the temple or against Caesar.” Thus, the charges against him fell under these three heads: he was the ringleader of an unlawful sect; he had profaned the temple; and he had stirred up insurrection.⁸⁰

Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?”

Since Paul was a citizen of Rome he had the right to appeal to the highest tribunal, so he said, “I appeal to Caesar.”

Festus conferred with his council and then said, “You have appealed to Caesar [Nero]⁸¹ to Caesar you shall go.”

Now when several days had elapsed, King Agrippa and Berenice arrived at Caesarea, and paid their respects to Festus. The king was King Herod Agrippa II, son of Herod Agrippa I, consequently he was the brother of Drusilla. His father died when he was seventeen, and so the Romans would not entrust all of his father’s dominion to him, but they gave him Chalcis.

Berenice was the sister of Agrippa II, but was thought to be living in an incestuous relation with him. Berenice had been the wife of her uncle, Herod, Prince of Chalcis, but on his death she came to live with her brother. Afterward, she became the wife of Polemo, King of Cicilia, but eventually she returned to Herod

⁸⁰ H.D.M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell, *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18 Acts and Romans vol. 2, p. 251, vs.8.

⁸¹ Nero was Caesar from AD 54-68.

Agrippa. Later, she became the mistress of Vespasian and of Titus in succession.⁸²

Caesarea was situated on the coast of Palestine about 70 miles from Jerusalem. It was built by Herod the Great, and became the official residence for Herodian kings and Judaeen procurators like Festus. The name of the site “kaisariyeh” lingers even today.

While the royal persons were there Festus laid Paul's case before the king. Agrippa had said to Festus, “I also would like to hear the man myself.”

“Tomorrow,” Festus said, “you shall hear him.”

Herod Agrippa II was the son of Herod Agrippa I, who had James killed with the sword. He was grandson of Herod Antipas, who had John beheaded. Herod Aripa II was also great grandson of Herod the Great (who murdered the children in Bethlehem, and attempted to murder the Lord himself). He was as they say an expert in Jewish law, and had the right to appoint the Jewish high priest. He had custody of the ceremonial robes the High Priest wore on the Day of Atonement—a power that gave him no small leverage over the Jewish authorities. He helped Caesar destroy his own nation, and went to Rome with Berenice. He died in AD 100, the third year of the reign of Trajan.

The historian Emil Schurer characterizes Agrippa as “...indolent and feeble.” An incident happened that revealed something about his character: when he visited Jerusalem he was accustomed to occupy the house that had formerly been the palace of the Hasmoneans. This building was already large, but he added a tower, so that from the tower he might overlook the citadel and the temple. From there, in his idle hours, he would look down on the sacred proceedings within the temple. The Jews found this obnoxious and they built a higher wall to

⁸² Ibid., *The Pulpit Commentary*, p. 251.

shut off his view. Agrippa appealed to Festus, but the Jews appealed to Poppea the wife of Nero. The Jews kept their privacy.

Judaism was to Agrippa not a matter of conviction, but only of interest in so far as it provided external ceremony. Schurer says he was interested only in the trifling and the insignificant points of the religion.⁸³

Once, when the foundations of the temple began to sink, Agrippa had timbers of great size brought from Lebanon. The plan was to raise the foundation by 20 cubits (about 30 feet). But they never used the wood to improve the temple; rather, the Romans used it for engines of war.

Agrippa allowed the Levites who sang psalms in worship services to wear the linen of the priests—it was their distinctive badge, and it was a great offense against the law.

These were the Berenice and Agrippa II who sat at the trial of the Apostle Paul.

Acts 25:23 So, on the next day when Agrippa came together with Bernice amid great pomp, and entered the auditorium accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city, at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in.

25:24 And Festus said, “King Agrippa, and all you gentlemen here present with us, you behold this man about whom all the people of the Jews appealed to me, both at Jerusalem and here, loudly declaring that he ought not to live any longer ...”

⁸³ E. Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 1st Div. , Vol. II, p. 98.

26:1 and Agrippa said to Paul, “You are permitted to speak for yourself.”

Surely Paul knew of the usavory and disreputable lives of the people who sat to hear his defense. Could he not have known about the conflicts Agrippa had with the Jewish priests, or the incestuous relationship Agrippa had with Berenice? If he did, the knowledge did not affect his bearing. He presented himself before the court with dignity and courtesy. He was the true Christian gentleman.

Then Paul proceeded to make his defense,

26:2 ”In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;
3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among *the* Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

26:4 ”So then, all Jews know my manner of life from my youth up, which from the beginning was spent among my *own* nation and at Jerusalem; 5 since they have known about me for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that I lived *as* a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of our religion.

Paul had been conscientious from the first, a friend of virtue, and a servant of the law. He had not sacrificed his youth to vice. Our impression of him is that Paul was a man of principle.

Paul said to his accusers and judges,

26:6 ”And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers; 7 *the promise* to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly serve *God* night and day. And for this hope, O King, I am being accused by Jews. 8 Why is it

considered incredible among you *people* if God does raise the dead?”

Festus had said to Herod that,

“... They simply had some points of disagreement with him about their own religion and a certain dead man, Jesus, whom Paul asserted to be alive.”⁸⁴

We could ask the same question today of the infidels that occupy not just the offices of power but of the heathen who teach in our schools. “Why is it considered incredible among you people if God does raise the dead?” Why can’t you believe that He creates life? That He Provides laws? That He rewards and punishes?

This is the appeal to faith. Alas, a faith that the world does not have, a faith that eluded the tribunal before whom Paul spoke.

You believe so much; why not this? The Jewish scriptures contained the doctrine of the resurrection. Job said, “Even after my skin is flayed, yet without my flesh I shall see God.” Job 19:26; the Psalmist wrote, “God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave,” Psa. 49:15; Daniel mentions it also.

Do not even the heathen long for the perfection of humanity? Don’t they feel the moral helplessness of mankind?

Here is the challenge of Christianity to personal acceptance. The credible ought to be accepted, if it comes with the evidence of fact. The real root of unbelief is personal and moral. It is an act of the will. Paul refers to himself—in a manner of speaking—as, “I

⁸⁴ Acts 25:19.

was once as you are; but the facts were too much for me.”

The resurrection is not a mere speculative doctrine or unpractical mystery, but is the root of the whole system of Christianity; it stands at the entrance of the new way, into which we are all invited; both as sealing the testimony of Christ, and as opening the new world to our faith and setting our affection on things above.

In spite of the anti-Christian passion that had worked in him in those days when he remained unconverted (which he does not attempt to conceal), he had retained the Pharisaic hope of the resurrection of the dead. The zeal of the Jews, however, against the gospel, tended to cut them off from living connection with the religion of their fathers, and from the blessings of the better covenant that superseded the old. And this zeal of unbelief was blind. What was there incredible in the idea of the resurrection of the dead? The question may be put to the unbeliever this way: fundamentally, what is there so incredible in any of the beliefs and teachings of Christianity? What is there so incredible in its objects?

Next, Paul appeals to the facts. He points to the incontrovertible evidence: “Once I was a persecutor; now I am a disciple.”

Paul continued, saying,

26:9 “So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 “And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. 11 “And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities. 12 “While so engaged as I

was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests,
13 at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me.

26:14 “And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ 15 “And I said, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

He had resisted conviction, so now he can speak with feeling to the skeptics and doubters because he had felt that same stubborn doubt and resistance himself. He had been under an illusion. He had thought it his duty to oppose Jesus.

The Pulpit Commentary says of Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road,

The splendour of that light from heaven shining on his path of blind fury can never be forgotten. And the first beam which breaks through the night of our sin and stubbornness is worthy of eternal recollection and meditation (2 Cor. 4:6). The glory of the once humiliated but now enthroned Saviour surpasses all. With the light comes the voice, which humiliates and raises, rebukes and cheers. The voice echoes the secret voice of his conscience, hitherto, in the intoxication of his passion, half heard or not heard at all. But it is also a voice that is loftier than that of the self-condemning conscience--

divine, pardoning, and cheering. 'Stand up!' God slays and makes alive.⁸⁵

His was the proclamation of a divine mission. Showing that there was reason in his firmness and confidence; he was divinely sent and would be divinely cared for.

Acts 26:16 “But arise, and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; 17 delivering you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, 18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in me.”

The state of the world without Christ is grim because it is dominated by Satan, the father of the lie. His world is one of darkness, intellectual and moral, with no exceptions. Satan turned the light of the Greek and Roman worlds by sin into grosser darkness and superstition. Satan's world is pagan and heathen and in his kingdom of darkness mankind suffers under the rule of evil spirits who empower false teachers to deceive and to destroy. His is the dominion of the sensual, a reign of fear beneath the terror of pain, sickness and death.

But God has condemned sin in the flesh, and Jesus has come to overthrow the kingdom of Satan for it is impossible that such ignorance could remain. This Paul

⁸⁵ A. C. Hervey (Ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Excell), *The Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 18, Acts and Romans, p. 275.

asserts because he had met and had been commissioned by the risen Christ.

Paul said,

Acts 26:19 Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, 20 but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and even throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. 21 “For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. 22 And so, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying to both small and great, stating nothing but what the prophets and Moses said was going to take place; 3 that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He should be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and the Gentiles.”

It was an effective defense, more than adequate to exonerate him in the eyes of a reasonable man. But what was the effect upon the listeners?

Acts 26:24 And while Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, “Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad!”

Festus represents **the cynic**, the supposedly superior, worldly view of religion. He is the typical unspiritual man. Luther said, “The world esteems others as prudent so long as they are mad, and as mad when they cease to be mad and become wise.” The critics had said almost the same thing of the apostles on the Day of Pentecost, for they supposed the apostles to be drunk.

And of Christ himself they had said, “He is mad, and has a devil.”⁸⁶

Acts 26:25 But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. 26 ”For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner.⁸⁷

Agrippa was the man who had desired to look into the inner precincts of the temple and see its services, and had been denied. God had prepared better for him. On this day Paul threw down the wall of secrecy and declared to the king the awful truth of the suffering Messiah and his resurrection.

Simon Greenleaf said about the death and resurrection of Christ, “It would be difficult to select any place or period in the history of nations for the time and scene of a fictitious history or an imposture which would combine so many difficulties for the fabricator to surmount, so many contemporary writers to confront him with, and so many facilities for the detection of falsehood ...” than the time in which the gospel originated.⁸⁸

Mark Hopkins wrote,

Few persons, perhaps, give due attention to the relative position of the Christian history, which stands upon the very point of the intersection where three distinct lines of history meet—namely, the Jewish, the Grecian, and the

⁸⁶ John 10:20.

⁸⁷ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. 1995 (Ac 26:25–26). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

⁸⁸ I. H. Linton, *A Lawyer Examines the Bible*, p. 56.

Roman. These three bodies of ancient literature, alone, have descended, by an uninterrupted channel of transmission, to modern times; and these three, by a most extraordinary combination of circumstances, were brought together to elucidate the origination of Christianity. If upon the broad field of history there rests the common light of day, upon that spot where a new religion was given to man there shines the intensity of a common brightness. The Jews had their own literature, they had been formerly conquered by the Greeks, and the Greek language was in common use; they were also a Roman province, and during more than a century, in the centre of which stands the ministry of Christ, the affairs of Syria attracted the peculiar attention of the Roman government. No other people of antiquity can be named, upon whose history and sentiments there falls this triple flood of historic light; and upon no other period in the history of this one people do these triple rays so precisely meet as upon the moment the voice of one was heard in the wilderness of Jordan, saying, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.'

“Well, then, might an apostle say, 'These things were not done in a corner.' The time is not run back, like that of Indian legends, to obscure and fabulous ages; nor is it in what are called the dark ages of more modern times. It was a civilized and an enlightened age—a classic age—an age of poets, philosophers, and historians. Nor was it in Mecca—a city little known or visited by the civilized world, and where the people and language were homogenous—it was not there that Christ arose. It was in Jerusalem, in Western Asia—the theater of history from the first—and from the bosom of a people with all whose rites and usages we are perfectly acquainted. It was, perhaps, the only place on Earth in which a Roman governor could have called upon three languages to proclaim the accusation and the true

character of Christ. For the scripture says, 'And Pilate wrote an inscription also, and put it on the cross. And it was written, "Jesus the Nazarene, the King of the Jews." Therefore, this inscription many of the Jews read, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek.'⁸⁹

Here, then, was a mixed population, with different prejudices, different interests, speaking different languages, for that day a reading population, in a city to which not only the Jews dwelling in Palestine, but those from distant countries, and proselytes, came up yearly, as the center and seat of the only pure worship of God on earth. And was this the place to select for the production of forged writings? Or for an imposture of any kind to gather a force that should carry it over the earth?

Indeed, Christianity did not begin "in a corner," but in the center of its avowed and inveterate enemies, beneath the sovereign power of Imperial Rome, and at the open door of an empty tomb, which the world through all its trickery and cunning has not been able to conceal. Upon the weight of that evidence, that none of them could deny, Paul makes a personal appeal both to the Jews and to the Gentiles.

Paul then turns his attention to Agrippa. "King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do." And Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."

And Paul said, "I would to God, that whether in a short or a long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."

⁸⁹ John 19:19-20.

And what was the difference in the effect on the listeners? I have often wondered what was Agrippa's tone when he replied. Had Paul recognized in him the first stirrings of faith? Does Agrippa show us the example of the awakened conscience? We shall never know this side of eternity. But, in any case, what Agrippa feels he will not avow. He would lead a double life—representing one thing to the world, thinking another of himself. He is the type of a numerous class who would gladly be blessed were it not for the strait gate and the narrow way that they will not tread.

“How near we may be to bliss,” says the Pulpit, “Yet how far from it! The heart may be touched, the intellect illuminated, the will aroused, the hour acceptable, and yet—some deep stream of passion runs at our feet, which we will not ford; some 'cunning bosom sin' keeps out the good message of repentance and faith that would enter. The reply of Paul to Agrippa's light words again brings out a sharp contrast. Better be the “prisoner of Jesus Christ” than the prisoner of passion (or anything else). Better the regal freedom of the redeemed man's soul, in poverty and in chains, than the splendor of the potentate enslaved by lust and by the fear of men!

In the audience-chamber we had thus the most diverse attitudes of mind towards Christianity represented. Paul, in the full inspiration of faith and life in the Son of God; Agrippa, convinced but not converted; Berenice, probably obstinate, thinking on her incestuous relationship with Agrippa; Festus, hardened in cynicism. Some wanting little, others much, to make them Christians.

But there is one question that has to be asked, one question that has to be considered and answered: what is the practical difference between being almost saved and being quite condemned? What is it? Can you tell me? No?

Then, I'll tell you. None. None! There is no practical difference.

Acts 26:30 The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them...

And so, the sermon ended, the audience dispersed. Everyone went to his own place; and everyone remembered that the Savior has died, but he remembered his excuses as well.

Righteousness, self-control, judgment to come. These are the issues that faced the ones who heard Paul's sermon.

Josephus records some of the deeds of Porcius Festus.⁹⁰ He also tells of the death of Festus. He wrote the following,

“And Caesar [Nero], upon hearing of the death of Festus, sent Albinus to Judea as procurator ...”

Festus lived about 2 years after coming to Palestine. How long he lived after he heard Paul's sermon is hard to say. It is not likely that he was ever converted by what he heard.

Sometimes a person needs to think about a lesson before he is converted by it. In an address delivered at a church in Pittsburgh in 1884, the speaker told of a man named Luke Short, who died in New England at the age of 116. When he was over a century old, Luke Short was converted by a sermon he had heard a hundred years before in England. The text -- “If any one does not love the Lord, let him be accursed.”⁹¹ --and he remembered it.

There is always hope.

⁹⁰ *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book xx, Chap. 8, sect. 9 & 10.

⁹¹ 1 Cor. 16:22.

As we hear today the voice that spoke 2000 years ago, let us hope and pray that the message he brings to us shall not be without profit, and not be without inspiration, and not be without good result.

Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. He lived without sin under the Law of Moses. He was crucified for claiming to be the Son of God, the Messiah. He arose from the dead. And so, being highly exalted, he offers pardon to each and every one who would reach out and take it.

Don't give the excuse of Agrippa.

Obedience, purity and love

John, in the last chapter of his gospel, tells of the final appearance of the Lord to the disciples. They are beside the Sea of Galilee; they have eaten the fish Jesus had told them they could catch by casting on the right side of the boat, and Jesus has turned his attention to Peter. Peter had betrayed him, but now Jesus says, “Simon, *son* of John, do you love ⁹² Me more than these?”⁹³

Peter answers, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love ⁹⁴ You.”

The word that Jesus used in this passage is a love that can only be known from the action it prompts. Vine says,

God’s love is seen in the gift of His Son,⁹⁵
but obviously this is not the love of
complacency, or affection, that is, it was not

⁹² Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). *Vol. 2: Vine’s Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words* (20). Old Tappan NJ: Revell. *Agapao* (ἀγαπάω , (25)) and the corresponding noun *agapē* present “the characteristic word of Christianity, and since the Spirit of revelation has used it to express ideas previously unknown, enquiry into its use, whether in Greek literature or in the Septuagint, throws but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the New Testament.

⁹³ John 21:15.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, Vine, W., & Bruce, F. *Phileo* (φιλέω , (5368)) is to be distinguished from *agapaō* in this, that *phileō* more nearly represents tender affection.

⁹⁵ 1 John 4:9, 10.

drawn out by any excellency in its objects.⁹⁶ It was an exercise of the Divine will in deliberate choice made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself.⁹⁷

Agapao is a love that is not commanded as an emotion, but as a choice—an act of the will.

Vine says further of *agapao*,

“Christian love has God for its primary object, and expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to His commandments.⁹⁸ Self-will, that is, self-pleasing, is the negation of love to God.

“Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Rom. 15:2, and works no ill to any, 13:8-10; love seeks opportunity to do good to ‘all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith,’⁹⁹

Peter replied with the Greek word which more nearly indicates tender affection. *Phileo* denotes an inclination prompted by sense and emotion.

Three times the Lord asked Peter the same question, using the same Greek word for love (*agapao*); three times Peter replied using the same Greek word (*phileo*).

⁹⁶ Romans 5:8.

⁹⁷ Ibid., Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). *Vol. 2: Love*.

⁹⁸ John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; 1 John 2:5; 5:3; 2 John 6.

⁹⁹ Ibid., Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). *Vol. 2: Love*. Gal. 6:10. See further 1 Cor. 13 and Col. 3:12-14.”

Why did each use the word he used? Is it that Jesus was asking Peter for a decision, and Peter was mired in his emotions? Or, was it that the differences in their usage were merely superficial?

Vine says,

The context itself indicates that *agapaō* in the first two questions suggests the love that values and esteems. It is an unselfish love, ready to serve. The use of *phileō* in Peter's answers and the Lord's third question, conveys the thought of cherishing the Object above all else, of manifesting an affection characterised by constancy, from the motive of the highest veneration.¹⁰⁰

Jesus also said, "... this is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."¹⁰¹

What love is this that can be commanded? Most of us have been taught that love is an emotion that arises spontaneously, unbidden. But that is not, as they say, Christian love.

Peter used both words—*agapao* and *phileo*—in his first letter, where he wrote,

1 Peter 1:22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren (*phileo*), fervently love (*agapao*) one another from the heart, 23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). *Vol. 2*: (21–22).

¹⁰¹ John 15:12-13.

Peter said that purification of the soul for a sincere love lies in obedience to the truth. Obedience may also become necessary for survival.

In July 1976, Israeli commandos made a daring raid at the airport in Entebbe, Uganda, to rescue 103 Jewish hostages. In less than 15 minutes, the soldiers killed all seven of the kidnapers and set the captives free. But three of the hostages were killed during the raid.

As the commandos entered the terminal they shouted in Hebrew, “Get down! Crawl!” The Jewish hostages understood the Hebrew and lay down on the floor, while the guerrillas, who did not speak Hebrew, were left standing. Quickly, the rescuers shot the kidnapers.

But two of the hostages hesitated—even though they understood the warnings in Hebrew. Unfortunately, they were shot along with the kidnapers. One of the hostages who had been lying down when the commandos entered the airport stood up. He, too, was shot with the bullets meant for the kidnapers.

Had these three obeyed the orders of the commandos they would have been freed with the rest. Instead, they died with the kidnapers.

Many people have heard the message of the gospel. Those who obey it will live. Those who don't obey will perish. And, as Peter wrote, those who obey the gospel also purify their souls—for love of the brethren.

Genuine brotherly love is unfeigned; that is, it is not a pretense. It is much like the love of a little girl in a story told by Harry Pickup.

Harry Pickup, a preacher widely known for his talent, friendliness and affable personality, worked at Florida College in Temple Terrace and preached in Florida for many years. In a sermon at the MacDill Avenue Church of Christ in Tampa he told of a time when he was preaching, and he was in the middle of his

sermon. He was “just getting wound up,” when he saw a child, a little girl, get down from a pew and start down the aisle. He watched her as she came toward him. Not knowing what she had in mind he walked toward her to meet her. All the while he kept preaching. As she drew close to him, he bent down to pick her up. Then to his surprise, as he bent over, she tiptoed as high as she could, and planted a kiss right on his cheek.

This might have been the only time that Harry Pickup had a loss for words. We will never know.

The incident shows us what this type of love ought to be. It is the spontaneous love that is shown by a little child, a love that is sincere and without pretense. As Peter says it should be,

“Sincere, fervent and from the heart.”

The story is told of Scottish soldiers who, in the 2nd World War, were forced by their Japanese captors to build a jungle railroad. During this captivity and slavery their behavior had degenerated steadily until it became barbarous. But one afternoon something happened: a shovel was missing.

The Japanese officer in charge became enraged. He demanded that the missing shovel be produced--or else. When nobody among the prisoners came forward, the officer got his gun and threatened to kill them all on the spot.

Finally, one man stepped forward. The officer put away his gun, picked up another shovel, and beat the man to death. When it was over, the survivors picked up the body and carried it with them to the second tool check. This time there was no shovel missing. In fact, there had been a miscount at the first check point. There never was a missing shovel.

The word spread quickly through the whole camp. An innocent man had been willing to die to save the others! The incident had a profound effect on the

prisoners. Now they began to treat each other like brothers.

When the allied army came and defeated the Japanese, they found the survivors of the camp lined up in front of their captors. Many of the prisoners were no more than skeletons. But instead of attacking their captors they said, “No more hatred. No more killing. What we need now is forgiveness.”

Love as *agape* has been described as seeking the greater good of the object of the love, seeking their best interest under every circumstance. This means seeking the best interest not only of your friends, but of your enemies also. Seek their best interest even if they do not deserve it. Seek their best interest even if they do not know you are seeking it.

Peter said, “Fervently love one another from the heart.”

The Lord said,

Matthew 5:43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy.’ 44 “But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Peter said,

1 Peter 1:23 for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.

24 FOR,

“ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS,

AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE
FLOWER OF GRASS.
THE GRASS WITHERS,
AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,
25 BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD
ENDURES FOREVER.”

And this is the word which was preached to
you.

Indeed, life in the flesh is temporary, brief. In the
book of Genesis we read the following,

Gen 5:5 So all the days that Adam lived were
nine hundred and thirty years, and he died.

Gen 5:8 So all the days of Seth were nine
hundred and twelve years, and he died.

Gen 5:11 So all the days of Enosh were nine
hundred and five years, and he died.

Gen 5:14 So all the days of Kenan were nine
hundred and ten years, and he died.

Gen 5:17 So all the days of Mahalalel were eight
hundred and ninety-five years, and he died.

Gen 5:20 So all the days of Jared were nine
hundred and sixty-two years, and he died.

Gen 5:27 So all the days of Methuselah were
nine hundred and sixty-nine years, and he
died.

Gen 5:31 So all the days of Lamech were seven
hundred and seventy-seven years, and he
died.

Gen 9:29 So all the days of Noah were nine
hundred and fifty years, and he died.

The common denominator in all this is “...and he
died.”

When we read that many of these men lived to well over nine hundred years before they died, and then consider that nowadays most are dead before 100 we must realize that life in the flesh is brief.

We all age, we get old and we die, that is the heritage of all who live in this flesh.

But we who are Christians have been born of a seed which does not die. The flesh perishes, but the spirit lives forever. We are children of the spirit. We have been begotten by a word that existed before the worlds came into existence, and will still exist when this world is smoke: "...the living and abiding word of God."

All of us have been born by this same word. We are brothers and sisters with an eternity before us. The relationships we have in the church are not transitory like the relationships that exist in the world—they are permanent.

In this connection consider what the Apostle Paul wrote,

2 Corinthians 4:8 ... we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death works in us, but life in you. 13 But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak, 14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. 15 For all things are for your sakes, so that

the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God. 16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 18 while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

We ought to have the kind of loves, *agape* and *phileo*, that Peter urges us to have because we have been born again, and that not of corruptible seed.

The love the Lord commanded is active good will; it is a love that always seeks the greater good of the object of the love.

Years ago the asylums for the mentally ill were crude, primitive, more jails than hospitals. One such asylum had a dungeon where they put the most unmanageable, the most violent, and the most hopeless. Into this dungeon they put a little girl. The only thing they knew about her was her name--Annie.

Sometimes, she would be violent and abusive. At those times Annie would throw herself at the bars of her cage when anyone approached. Then there were times when she would sit in stony silence.

There was an elderly woman who worked at this asylum, and she was approaching retirement, having spent many years in caring for the mentally ill. She took her lunch one day and went down to the dungeon. Near that cool and damp cage she found a seat and she sat down to eat. She offered some food to Annie, but Annie refused—protesting loudly.

The elderly woman had no success that day, nor the next, nor for many days after, but in spite of the discouraging results she persisted. She came every day to eat her lunch beside the little animal-like girl, to receive her abuse, and to offer her some food. One day she brought some brownies, and offered some of these to Annie. Annie refused. So the woman left some of the brownies where Annie could reach them—and the woman left. When she returned, the brownies were gone.

That was the beginning of a slow and agonizing treatment for the mad little girl. Slowly, Annie regained her faculties—through kind and loving care, until one day she stood before the doctor's of the asylum fully recovered. They said to her, “You may leave now, and go anywhere you wish.”

She said, “I don't want to leave. I prefer to stay where I have received the kindest treatment. I want to repay in kind what I have received so generously myself.”

Her name was Anne Sullivan. Some of you may remember her as the woman who patiently labored with Helen Keller so that the blind and deaf Helen might learn to communicate with the world, and gain world fame for her help of the handicapped.

Helen Keller was blind and deaf because of a childhood disease, and because of her misfortune became violent and abusive to anyone who was sent to care for her. Annie Sullivan had been over that road before.

Anne Sullivan married to become Anne Sullivan Macy. She received from Queen Victoria an award for the one who greatly exemplified service to mankind.

This is an example of love, and its fruits.

Love is patient. Love is kind. Love has far-reaching effects .

John wrote,

1 John 3:13 Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you. 14 We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. 15 Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 19 We will know by this that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him 20 in whatever our heart condemns us; for God is greater than our heart and knows all things. 21 Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; 22 and whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight. 23 This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. 24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

Strangers and Exiles Upon the Earth

Lt. Philip Knowland was the friend of Aaron Burr. Burr was the man who killed Alexander Hamilton in a duel. The criminal charges that followed implicated both Philip Knowland and Aaron Burr. The court acquitted Burr, but singled out Knowland as an example of punishment.

Knowland told the court, "I wish I may never hear of the United States again."

The judge then pronounced an unusual sentence upon Knowland. He said, "The court rules that you are to be taken to New Orleans, where you will be delivered to the commander of a U.S. Warship. You are to be secluded in your quarters. Thereafter you are not to see the United States of America, or even to hear conversation concerning the United States of America spoken in your presence."

On September 23, 1807 they placed Knowland aboard a US warship, and the ship sailed. Thereafter he sailed the empty seas. Never again did he see his native land. Neither did he hear a word about its fortunes, or misfortunes. They expelled Knowland from his own land and he wandered lonely and abandoned for the remainder of his life. Philip Knowland was the legendary, "Man without a country."

The story is fiction, of course. It is from a book by Edward Everett Hale, a tale of how a man lost a possession dear to every one of us.

Do you know where your country is? Do you know where your home is?

The Christian should never forget where his home is, for the Christian is like the sons of Israel as they

suffered captivity in a strange land. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 137,

BY the rivers of Babylon,

There we sat down and wept,

When we remembered Zion.

2 Upon the willows in the midst of it

We hung our harps.

3 For there our captors demanded of us songs,

And our tormentors mirth, *saying*, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion.”

4 How can we sing the LORD’S song

In a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

May my right hand forget *her* skill.

6 May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,

If I do not remember you,

If I do not exalt Jerusalem

Above my chief joy.

Those were the Jewish people lamenting their exile from Palestine. Theirs was an Earthly home, but the heavenly Jerusalem is the Christian’s home.

Solomon speaks of man’s eternal home in the book of Ecclesiastes,

Eccl. 12:1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, “I have no pleasure in them” 5 ... For man goes to his eternal home, And the mourners go about the streets.

The Bible tells us that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,

Hebrews 11:13 ... died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

What promises were these? They did not receive them during their earthly pilgrimage. They only saw them afar off, and greeted them as the wanderer greets his longed-for home, even when he comes in sight of it at a distance drawing himself as it were, magnetically, and embracing with inward love that which is yet far off.

Remember, even Jesus had no earthly home to which He could attach Himself. He replied to the one who said, "I will follow You wherever You go." But Jesus answered,

Luke 9:58 ... "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

Jesus and His followers are like the psalmist who wrote in Psalm 84,

1 How lovely is Your tabernacle, O LORD of hosts! 2 My soul longs, yes, even faints For the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. 3 Even the sparrow has found a home, And the swallow a nest for herself, Where she may lay her young; Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. 4 Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; They will still be praising You. Selah.

C. E. Macartney wrote,

"Years ago people brought skylarks from England, and set them loose in one of the eastern sections of the United States. The birds found a home. Soon their numbers increased. One day an ornithologist came

across some of them. Interested, he listened to the song of the emigrant birds. As he listened he saw an Irish laboring man suddenly stop, take off his cap, and turn his face skyward. He had a look of surprise on his face. The joy of pleasant memory overspread his face as he listened to the song of a bird that he had heard in his youth. He had heard the larks sing in Ireland. To the bird expert it was only a scientific observation, but for the Irishman it was the sound of home.¹⁰²

So through the gospel of Christ there come to us those songs that tell us of our heavenly home.

You love the place where you live, but is it your home? A Christian can love the land in which he lives, but from deeper comes the feeling that he belongs elsewhere. This land, this country, he is only passing through.

Toward home men are prompted and driven,

“... by one of the strongest and deepest natural instincts of the human heart. And hence, though many may, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, wander about as pilgrims and sojourners for awhile, it is always with a view of securing a permanent home somewhere.”¹⁰³

The Hebrew writer said,

Hebrews 11:14 For those who say such things
declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15
And truly if they had called to mind that
country from which they had come out, they
would have had opportunity to return. 16
But now they desire a better, that is, a

¹⁰² C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, p. 168.

¹⁰³ R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary, Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 312.

heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

Some of us have migrated to our present homes from other states of the United States, others have migrated from other countries. Many of us are like Abd Er Rahman.

Abd Er Rahman was the first Caliph of Cordova, Spain. There, thousands of miles from his native haunts along the banks of the River Euphrates, the Moslem prince set up his kingdom and ruled over the conquered Spaniards. But always he was homesick for Mesopotamia (the land between the rivers). To relieve his sorrow he had a palm tree brought to him and planted in the courtyard of the palace at Cordova. It reminded him of his home. Never could he gaze upon that palm tree without bursting into tears.¹⁰⁴

My mother was like Rahman—she was uprooted from a little Appalachian town, nestled in the hills of West Virginia, and brought down to the flatlands of Florida to live in a crowded city. They brought her body, but I think they left her heart in West Virginia. Thereafter, whenever she referred to West Virginia she always called it “home.”

The palm tree was the reminder to the caliph, but the Lord himself gave us our reminder, the reminder that our citizenship is in another country, that our allegiance is to another King, that our home is in another place. On the night he was betrayed, the Lord

1 Corinthians 11:23 ... took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” 25 In the same manner He also took

¹⁰⁴ C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustration*, p. 168.

the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

So we eat the Lord's Supper and we remember. We remember how the Lord suffered for us. He was rejected in His own land, and by His own people. The Christian is the same as He in this world. And we remember the inhospitable land in which we live. It is as Paul said to the Corinthians,

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, 3 if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. 6 So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. 7 For we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

In this life we look for friends, and if we are blessed we find a few. Some find none. Regrettably, the world is not our home and the people who belong to it are not our friends.

The Roman Colosseum whose construction "...was commenced by the Emperor Vespasian was finished by his son, Titus. It was Titus who also conquered the Jews. The Colosseum was built to satisfy the Roman lust for the spectacular and the exciting, for bloodshed and for cruelty. Covering five acres of ground, the colossal bowl could accommodate eighty-five thousand of the populace of Rome. Built in the shape of an ellipse, and founded on eighty acres it rose to the height of 160 feet. The outside consisted of four rows of columns, representing successive orders of architecture—Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian—and was encrusted with marble and decorated with statues. Inside, tiers of stone benches rose one above the other. Huge canopies could be spread over the seats to protect the spectators from rain and sun. Sixty-four exits, or vomitories, in a short time admitted or poured forth the blood-loving throngs. And to this day you can see the Roman numerals on fragments of the arches showing the number of the entrance corresponding to the ticket held by the patron.

C. E. Macartney says of the Colosseum,

“...gushing fountains cooled and refreshed the air and aromatics diffused a pleasant odor to offset that of the wild beasts. The open space in the center was called the arena, from the Latin word for the sand with which it was carefully overlaid. Under the lowest tier of benches were the dens of the wild beasts, for which the whole earth had been ransacked, and side by side with them were the gloomy caverns where the prisoners and martyrs spent their last hours before they were thrust forth into the blazing arena to fight with beasts.”¹⁰⁵

When Domitian, the son of Titus, came to the throne he launched a bitter persecution against

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., C. E. Macartney, p. 63.

Christians. His hatred caused the arrest of thousands, many of whom were put to death by torture. Others were sacrificed to wild beasts in the arena of the Colosseum.¹⁰⁶

For Christians, then and now, the world holds nothing but “Colosseums” in one form or another, because the world knows nothing but its lust for pleasure, its scorn and hatred of a just and quiet life, and its prideful boasting in towers and Colosseums, in palaces and glittering images. The world knows Christians only as impediments, as outsiders saying untactful and discomforting things.

Peter said this to those “... who reside as aliens” upon the Earth in his first letter,

1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

When the ten thousand Greeks fought their way out of Persia the one hope that sustained them and made them brave in battle was the thought of reaching the sea

¹⁰⁶ Brumback, Robert H., *History of the Church through the Ages*, p. 14.

toward which they were marching. For when they reached the sea they knew they would not be far from home. The sea was the hope that, like a banner, floated before them as they fought and marched. Let the thought of the soul's true home be often upon your mind. Think on its joys, its powers, its enterprises, its fountains of knowledge, its happiness, its absolute harmony with the soul's deepest desires, think of catching up the broken threads again and finishing what we began here. Think of the company of angels, and spirits of just men made perfect, the Lamb on the throne, and those thrilling reunions. And as Henry Alford wrote,

“O then what raptured greetings
On Canaan's happy shore,
What knitting severed friendships up
Where partings are no more.”¹⁰⁷

There is the story that “when Rufus Choate, the distinguished American statesman went to England in search of health, a friend said to him, “I feel sure that your health will be restored and that you will be living and at your work ten years from now.” “Living ten years from now!” said the great lawyer. “I shall be living a thousand years from now.” In a few days Mr. Choate died, but in the sense in which he used the words he did not die.¹⁰⁸

Rufus Choate looked forward to a permanent home where there was no illness and no death.

During the Civil War there were wounded soldiers on board a boat traveling down the Tennessee River. It

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., C. E. Macartney.

¹⁰⁸ Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (378). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

was after the battle at Shiloh. There was a man going about the deck giving the wounded a drink of water. At length he came to a soldier who made no answer when he spoke with him, so he told the surgeon about him. The surgeon looked at him and said,

“He cannot recover because he has lost too much blood.”

The first man said, “I can't find out his name, and it seems a pity to let him die without knowing who he is. Don't you think we can bring him to?”

At the surgeon's direction the man gave the wounded soldier a little water and brandy. As he was doing this he asked another soldier standing by if he knew the boy's name.

The soldier answered, “I do. He is my friend. His name is William Clark, and he has a widowed mother.”

Presently, the young man opened his eyes, and the first man said to him, “William, do you know where you are?”

Still dazed, the young man looked around for a moment. Then he said, “Oh, yes, I'm on my way home to mother.”

“Yes, you are on your way home,” the first man said, “but the surgeon says you won't reach your earthly home. I thought I'd like to ask you if you have any message for your mother?”

At that the young man's face strengthened and he answered, “Yes, tell my mother that I died trusting in Jesus.”

And so it is that if you can't reach you earthly home, be sure that you have a heavenly home—where you'll be welcome.

Mingled with thoughts of returning home are feelings that at home we will find rest and relief from burdens, relief from suffering. William Clark evidently

saw his home after Shiloh as the place of comfort where he might regain his health. When he realized that was not to be, he reverted to the eternal home where every burden is lifted, and every pain is relieved.

Isaiah wrote,

Isaiah 33:14 The sinners in Zion are afraid;
Fearfulness has seized the hypocrites: “Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?” 15 He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly, He who despises the gain of oppressions, Who gestures with his hands, refusing bribes, Who stops his ears from hearing of bloodshed, And shuts his eyes from seeing evil: 16 He will dwell on high; His place of defense will be the fortress of rocks; Bread will be given him, His water will be sure. 17 Your eyes will see the King in His beauty; They will see the land that is very far off. 18 Your heart will meditate on terror: “Where is the scribe? Where is he who weighs? Where is he who counts the towers?” 19 You will not see a fierce people, A people of obscure speech, beyond perception, Of a stammering tongue that you cannot understand. 20 Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts; Your eyes will see Jerusalem, a quiet home, A tabernacle that will not be taken down; Not one of its stakes will ever be removed, Nor will any of its cords be broken. 21 But there the majestic LORD will be for us A place of broad rivers and streams, In which no galley with oars will sail, Nor majestic ships pass by 22 (For the LORD is our Judge, The LORD is our Lawgiver, The LORD is our King; He will save us);

The Lord himself said,

John 14:1 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 “In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3 “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

The Athenians used to have a race in which the runners carried lighted torches. The victors who were crowned were those who arrived at the goal with their torches still burning. May you come to your goal—reach the end of your journey—with your torch still burning.

Let heaven be on your mind.

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