

The Way of Truth

Vol. 81

“Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”

No. 9

HOLD ME TIGHT

See page 5

November 2023



THE PROPER IDENTIFICATION OF LUCIFER

THE ONLY reference to the term, “Lucifer,” is found in Isaiah 14:12—“How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!”

Then in verse 13, referring to Lucifer, it reads: “For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north.” From these two verses comes the false teaching that Lucifer is another name for Satan, or the devil, and that he was kicked out of heaven.

At first glance such an interpretation and teaching may seem minor and inconsequential. But, truth is, it propagates a false understanding of heaven and its environment. There was never a war in heaven where God’s throne is—nor could there ever be!

The comments of Bible historian Adam Clarke are very helpful to the understanding of the true identity of Lucifer: “Isaiah 14: verse 12—**O Lucifer, son of the morning**—The *Versions* in general agree in this translation, and render *kkyh heilel* as signifying *Lucifer*, *fwsfurov*, the *morning stars*, whether *Jupiter* or *Venus*; as these are both *bringers of the morning light*, or *morning stars*, annually in their turn. And although the context speaks explicitly concerning Nebuchadnezzar, yet this has been, I know not why, applied to the chief of the fallen angels, who is most incongruously denominated *Lucifer*, (the bringer of light!) an epithet as common to him as those of *Satan* and *Devil*. That the Holy Spirit by his prophets should call this arch-enemy of God and man the *light-bringer*, would be strange indeed. But the truth is, the text speaks nothing at all concerning *Satan* nor his *fall*, nor the *occasion* of that fall, which many divines have with great confidence deduced from this text. O how necessary it is to understand the literal meaning of Scripture, that preposterous comments may be prevented! Verse 13—**I will ascend into heaven**—I will get the empire of the whole world. *I will exalt my throne above the stars of God*—above the Israelites, who are here termed the stars of God. This chapter speaks not of the ambition and fall of Satan, but of the pride, arrogance, and fall of Nebuchadnezzar.”

How can anyone argue with that? It is also important to know when studying the Bible that “heaven” does not always refer to the everlasting destination of redeemed souls where Jesus Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Heaven sometimes simply refers to an exalted state, high and lifted up—remember that!

Here are some points about the eternal heaven (where God’s throne is):

No one has ever been or could ever be “kicked out” of heaven.

There has never been nor could ever be a “war” or conflict in heaven—it is a place of peace.

Heaven is a holy place, filled with glory and with grace, and sin can never enter there.

What else do we know about heaven?

In Mark 16:19, we read: “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God.” So Christ’s abode is in heaven. Before he was martyred, Stephen saw Him, and he didn’t see any conflict going on in heaven. The war was here on Earth. If there was ever a war in heaven, there could be another one. Never!

According to Isaiah 6:1, we know God’s throne is there: “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.” Verse 2 tells us that angels are there: “Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.” Verse 3 tells us that the glory of God permeates and splashes unto the earth: “And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.”

We lay up treasures in heaven, according to Matthew 6:20—“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.” Thieves cannot break through and wars cannot break out.

Heaven is the destination of faithful souls. Matthew 25:34 declares, “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”

What a glorious place heaven is! I Corinthians 2:9, “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”

Satan will be noticeably missing in heaven, for he is doomed for eternity to another place. Matthew 25:41, “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.”

So, we know there is not, nor ever was, nor ever shall be a war in heaven where God’s throne is. But what about Revelation 12:7-12? “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.”

This passage refers to a *war in heaven*. But remember that heaven sometimes means simply “an exalted place or state.” Revelation is a book of symbols—to understand the book one must understand the symbols.

My understanding of “the war in heaven”:

The war spoken of here was not in heaven where God’s throne is, but rather speaks of being carried on

THE WAY OF TRUTH

(Registered Trademark)

Vol. 81

November 2023

No. 9

Devoted to the gospel of our loving Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave freely His life-blood, to save us from our many sins, to sanctify our fallen nature and to bring into one body all true believers, by whose stripes we are healed.

Published by the Church of God which assembles at 12819 Point Salem Road in Hagerstown, Maryland. Publishing office: 12811 Point Salem Road, Hagerstown, Maryland, U.S.A.

The Way of Truth is published without any given subscription price, and is supported by freewill offerings from our readers and funds supplied by the local congregation. It is sent out free to anyone who is interested enough to ask for it. We shall continue this policy as long as God sees fit to make it possible. FOREIGN READERS are requested to write us at least once a year if they wish to continue receiving the paper the following year. Address all correspondence to: The Way of Truth, P. O. Box 88, Hagerstown, Maryland 21741, U.S.A. Always when writing, give your name and address clearly, please.

—Gregory E. Tyler, Editor

Our telephone number is 301-739-2980

Our fax number is 301-739-7173

Our e-mail address is truth@fred.net

Visit our website at www.wayoftruth.org

in an exalted place on the earth. Ephesians 6:12 alludes to the conflict like this: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

It is a spiritual battle, not a carnal conflict. II Corinthians 10:4 says: "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds." In fact, this war is still going on right now! The battle of Armageddon is not some war of the future, but is a conflict going on for ages and continues to this present hour. It is a war between right and wrong; good vs. evil; God vs. Satan; righteousness vs. sin.

Without going into detail about all the symbolism in Revelation, let me simply state that the dragon in Revelation 12 is symbolic for Roman paganism, which was an instrument of the Wicked One. The dragon was CALLED the Devil and Satan, and does not symbolize Satan himself, but rather paganism.

Just because Lucifer is not a name for the devil, that does not mean that Satan does not exist. He is real and is an opposer of all that is good and godly. He is responsible for all the evil that is in the world. He is diabolical, rotten to the core. He is referred to as *Beelzebub, the wicked one, the god of this world, Satan, the devil*, but never as Lucifer.

While some teach that God created the devil as he is for the purpose of tempting man to sin, I cannot accept that premise. If that be true, then Satan and all his imps are doing what they were created to do. How then could God banish Satan and his devils to the regions of hell? It is more likely that all beings (including Satan) were created upright by a righteous God (Colossians 1:16). God is, has always been, and always will be holy,

righteous, and by nature is incapable of causing anyone to sin! James 1:13 tells us, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."

The Bible has little to say about what happened before the earth was created. It simply states that, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Of course, it was not God's beginning! He has no beginning. He is eternal. It was "the beginning" of this world and time as we know it.

We get a glimpse of events prior to the creation of the earth in the sixth verse of Jude: "And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." A similar verse is found in II Peter 2:4, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment ..." It seems that prior to the creation of earth there was a time and place (not heaven) where spirits were on probation, which time is passed.

While it is true that in the book of Revelation the term *angel* refers to the pastor or minister, that is not the case throughout the whole Bible. *Angel* is found more than 200 times, and more often than not refers to a spirit-being, either heavenly or demonic.

Though it is a mystery how Satan became so utterly vile, we know he is God's enemy and the enemy of all mankind and we must resist him steadfastly in the faith and overcome him!

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (I Peter 5:8). †

IN THIS ISSUE:

Being Thankful	Page 2
<i>Radio message by the late A. A. Craig</i>	
Poetry Page	Page 4
<i>Praising God through poems</i>	
Hold Me Tight	Page 5
<i>Full-length sermon by David Goble</i>	
The Children's Corner	Page 9
<i>"All the Things You Gave Us," by Rebecca Bland</i>	
Steps Heavenward	Page 10
<i>Chapter VI of the book by the late R. L. Berry</i>	
Bible Lesson of the Month	Page 12
<i>"The Kingdom of God"</i>	
The Question Box	Page 14
<i>Our monthly feature</i>	
Young People's Page	Page 15
<i>"God Is Good to Me ...," by Cassie Gossard</i>	
Perfectly Joined Together	Page 16
<i>Full-length sermon by Darrell Sanford</i>	
The Spirit of Thanksgiving	Page 21
<i>Compiled thoughts giving thanks to God</i>	

BEING THANKFUL

Radio Message
by the late Bro. Alvin Craig



UR SUBJECT for today's broadcast is "Being Thankful." I want to read, first of all, from Psalm 100: "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands. Serve the Lord with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations."

I feel safe in saying that in many various areas, there is a lack of appreciation and thanksgiving to almighty God for His blessings. There is too much murmuring and complaining about our lot. There are too many who have things, and yet they want so much more. They are not satisfied, and you'll find them murmuring and complaining. But we need to remember that it is God who gives us all blessings, and we need to be thankful for all His blessings unto us. "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us [I believe that with all my heart.], and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." Therefore, we are to give God thanks and praise for His blessings unto us.

The apostle Paul, standing in the midst of Mars' Hill in Athens, Greece, said, "He [God] giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; For in him we live, and move, and have our being." I thank God today that I am not among those who believe that we evolved from some lower species. I don't know how old the earth is. It makes little difference to me, but one thing I do know, in the beginning, whenever that was, God created the heavens and the earth. This earth, this universe, did not create itself. It did not come into existence of itself. There is a cause, a reason why, this earth is here today, and the universe is in existence. That cause, that reason, is almighty God. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). It is the Lord who has made us, and not we ourselves, so we are to be thankful unto God. We are to give Him thanksgiving and praise.

We not only owe Him thanks and praise for the material blessings, but it is God who causes the rain to fall, the sun to shine, and the crops to grow. It is God who blesses our fields and blesses our tables. I have done some traveling in my lifetime. I've been on five different continents of the world, and I have seen what we would call extreme poverty. People in our nation who think they are poor would be quite well off in comparison to some people in other lands. So again, we need to recognize that it is God who gives us the blessings that we receive. It is God that causes the crops to grow. It is God who blesses our tables and blesses us

with health and strength. Even in the Old Testament, we find where God told the Old Testament nation of Israel to remember Him, and to remember that the power to get wealth comes from Him.

Now, there are some specific things that I would like to mention on today's broadcast that we need to be thankful for. I call your attention to Psalm 103. Psalms 100 and 103 are supposed to be Psalms of David. At least, Psalm 100 is a Psalm of praise, and Psalm 103 is said to be a Psalm of David. Psalm 103:1 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name." That conveys to our hearts and minds the thought that we're not to be halfhearted about our thanksgiving or our praise to almighty God. We are told, "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name."

Psalm 104:1-5 says: "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire: Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever." So we are to bless God.

Notice the second verse of Psalm 103: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." How easy it is to forget the blessings that God bestows upon us! and we get our eyes on what we want, rather than the blessings that we have. We think about what we don't have, rather than being thankful for what we do have. A little story has been told of a man who was complaining about not having any shoes until he saw a man who didn't have any feet. The lesson there is that we are indeed blessed, and many times we are blessed more than our fellow men. So the Psalmist said, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

There is a spirit of gratitude. There is a spirit of thanksgiving that needs to be developed. There is also a spirit of murmuring and complaining and grumbling and griping because of what we don't have. That kind of a spirit or attitude needs to be gotten rid of, for we need to be thankful. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Who can count all His blessings? Who can count all the benefits that God bestows on us?

Each day when I get out of bed, I thank God for the privilege of being able to stand upon my feet and keep my balance. We had a neighbor some years ago who had an inner ear problem. He wasn't able to stand up and keep his balance. He staggered like a drunk man. He was a very fine man, and he certainly wasn't drunk, but he had an inner ear problem. How many times do we consider or express thanksgiving when we are able to get out of our bed? Years ago, one of the sisters in our congregation said that she was thankful she had a bed to get out of. That was a beautiful spirit to have. She was thankful she had a bed to get out of. We should be thankful for the health and strength that enables us to get out of bed. Across our nation and around the world, there are multitudes of people who are not able

to get out of bed. There are people who are not able to walk. There are people who are not able to stand up, so we need to be thankful for the privilege if we are blessed to be able to get up, able to walk, able to think, see, hear, and eat, etc. How we need to remember all of God's blessings! "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Verse 3 of Psalm 103: "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities ..." That to me is *the greatest blessing of all*. We can never give God thanks and praise enough for all His blessings to us, especially when it comes to the salvation of our souls. If you are a true child of God today and have been born of the Spirit of God, been washed in the blood, and your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life, that is doubtless the greatest blessing that you could possibly have. Who am I that a King would bleed and die for? Yes, I believe that the King of kings, the Lord of lords, came into this sin-cursed, sin-benighted world and suffered and bled and died upon the cross of Calvary for us to be saved from a life of sin. Sin is bondage. Sin is degrading. Sin is destructive. To be saved from a life of sin, to be saved from the bondage of sin, the servitude of the devil, is indeed a wonderful and marvelous blessing. The Psalmist goes on to say, "... who healeth all thy diseases." Jesus Christ not only died upon that cruel cross of Calvary to redeem our souls from sin, but before He was put on that cross to be crucified, He was scourged. He was beaten and whipped. Isaiah the prophet prophesied that with His stripes we *are* healed, and Peter said that by His stripes ye *were* healed.

I heard some years ago that a Roman soldier who was assigned to scourge a prisoner was allowed to make the lashes of his whip the length of his height. However tall he was, that was the length of the lashes he could make his whip. On the end of the lashes of his whip, he was able to work in sharp pieces of bones or little pieces of metal so he could inflict greater harm and greater damage to the person. Can you picture the back of the Lord Jesus as that Roman soldier lashed Him again and again with his whip? With those pieces of bones or pieces of metal in the lashes of his whip, can you imagine what kind of condition our Lord was in after that Roman soldier whipped Him? The Psalmist said about Christ, "Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases." The Lord Jesus healed when He was here on Earth. He had compassion on the people, and He is still in the healing business today. He has not lost any of His compassion and power. He's still able to save to the uttermost, and He is still able to heal all manner of sicknesses and diseases.

We understand that King Hezekiah was very, very sick. He was in a terrible state physically. Isaiah told him to get his house in order because he was going to die, but he turned his face toward the wall and cried unto heaven, and before Isaiah got out of the court, the Lord told him to go back and tell Hezekiah that He (God) had added fifteen years unto his life. The same God who did that is able to heal today. He healed and cleansed the lepers. He healed the palsied, the blind, the deaf, and the dumb. He is still the same today. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever" (Hebrews 13:8).

"Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction [Sin is destructive, detrimental, and harmful physically and spiritually.]; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psalm 103:1-5). Yes, the Lord satisfies our mouths with good things. We are indeed a blessed people, and we need to give God thanks and praise for all of His wonderful, wonderful blessings unto us. Again I say, there is too much murmuring, too much complaining, too much ingratitude in our nation and in our world today. We need to be more thankful. We need to be more appreciative for all that the Lord does for us.

The Psalmist said in Psalm 146, "Praise ye the Lord. Praise the Lord, O my soul. While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being."

In Psalm 147, he said, "Praise ye the Lord: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely. The Lord doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds."

In Psalm 148, we read: "Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord: for he commanded, and they were created."

In Psalm 149, "Praise ye the Lord. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of saints. Let Israel rejoice in him that made him: let the children of Zion be joyful in their King."

And then in Psalm 150, "Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord." †

As many of our readers know, we can be found on the internet at www.wayoftruth.org where in addition to reading past issues and other information, you can watch our general services every Sunday LIVE at 10:40 A.M. and 6:00 P.M. E.D.T. Enjoy Spirit-filled singing and preaching. Also, our mid-week service at 7:00 P.M. Wednesdays is aired live. There is a chatroom where you can interact with us and share your prayer requests.

Also, we now have a site streaming Church of God music and messages 24/7 recorded during our services. It can be found by going to wayoftruth.org and clicking on:

Way of Truth Internet Radio

THE POETRY PAGE

"I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving."—Psalm 69:30.

OUR PRAYER OF THANKS

Kay Hoffman

We humbly bow before You, Lord,
On this Thanksgiving Day,
To lift our prayers of gratitude
For all Your caring ways.
As You have blessed our harvest, Lord,
Let us remember, too,
That we should share with those in need
As You would have us do.
Around this festive board today
Are those we hold most dear,
And in our midst Your presence, Lord,
Seems so very near.
We're thankful for this land we love,
For sod and sky and tree,
For Pilgrims who braved unknown seas
That all may worship free.
We're thankful for each blessing, Lord,
You send along our way;
But may our greater "thanks" be shown
In serving You each day.

I AM THANKFUL

Amy C. Phillips

I am thankful, Father,
As this day dawns anew
For the precious sunlight—
Earth's beauties 'twill renew;
For the warmth, life-giving,
And the fruitage that it brings;
For each tree and flower
Each little bird that sings.

I am thankful, Father,
For the bounteous store
By Thy love provided,
Need I ask for more?
A home of warmth and comfort
And fuel too supplied;
Food and clothes, protection
From the storm outside.

I am thankful, Father,
For Thy blessed Son
Who brought to me salvation
By His own precious blood;

For the hope of heaven
Which in Thee I find,
For the Christ, our Savior,
Who came for all mankind.

I am thankful, Father,
Still again I say,
Thankful Thou art with us
Throughout the livelong day,
Thankful for the promises
In Thy precious Word,
Thankful for Thy children,
The family of God.

THANKFULNESS

Adelaide Anne Procter

My God, I thank Thee who hast made
The earth so bright;
So full of splendor and of joy,
Beauty and light;
So many glorious things are here,
Noble and right!

I thank Thee, too, that Thou hast made
Joy to abound;
So many gentle thoughts and deeds
Circling us round,
That in the darkest spot of earth
Some love is found.

I thank Thee more that all our joy
Is touched with pain;
That shadows fall on brightest hours;
That thorns remain;
So that earth's bliss may be our guide,
And not our chain.

I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast kept
The best in store;
We have enough, yet not too much
To long for more:
A yearning for a deeper peace,
Not known before.

I thank Thee, Lord, that here our souls,
Though amply blest,
Can never find, although they seek,
A perfect rest,—
Nor ever shall, until they lean
On Jesus' breast! †

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Colossians 3:15).

HOLD ME TIGHT

2023 Hagerstown Convention Message by Bro. David Goble



I WOULD LIKE to speak to you this evening on a subject that is dear to my heart. I hope it's a help to you. I came to this convention with the thought that I want to be encouraged, and I want to encourage. That's our mission tonight, Lord being our helper to help make it clear.

I was resting one night not too long ago and I woke up very early in the morning—it was dark—and for some reason the enemy was accusing me. I thought, "What have I done recently? I know what I did long ago. But what have I done recently that I deserve this treatment right now?" And fear came upon my heart. This had happened before in another place. I lay there and I thought, "God, help me." You pray for me because I have a leaky faucet and I need to get this out. "Lord, help me because I don't know why this is happening."

Has this ever happened to you where you've been accused by an adversary for no good reason? I think the ministry has reported this; there has been opposition to some of us to get here. This happens from time to time. All I know how to do is pray: "God, deliver me from the accuser. I'm not worthy of this accusation." It can be a terrifying thing. Satan wants to take your identity and your very existence from you; he wants to suck out the life from you. Furthermore, he wants to take the safe place that exists between us and God which we normally occupy. As I prayed and by faith went on, the enemy was severe and wouldn't give up. All I could do was hold on by faith. Pastors go through this too. If Satan can take down a pastor, he can take down a congregation. Finally the Lord gave me the assurance that He was still with me.

Even when we make a mistake and we get down on ourselves, we wonder: "Why did you say that? Why did you do that?" Maybe you inadvertently hurt somebody and you felt like: "Oh, by now I should know better. I shouldn't have done that. I have become careless in my experience. What's happened?" But I want to tell you something: God is not an accuser. Satan is the accuser. Satan is our enemy. We're fighting principalities in high places. I reminded myself that God is not an accuser. Oh, and the wonderful mercy of God that even after many years of serving God and walking with Him and things happen to us—I'm not talking about we fall out in sin and we cover it up—the wonderful mercy of God! God comes to you and holds you close. He says, "I don't condemn you. You hurt someone; it was careless of you. Your flesh got in the way." He hugs you and He keeps walking with you. He says, "I'm still with you. Don't let the accuser cast you down. That's not who I am. I'm still here. I haven't forsaken you, I haven't left you." That so encouraged me.

HOLD ME TIGHT

That's the subject of our thoughts tonight. Our title is "Hold Me Tight." Isn't it wonderful that we can have an experience with God where He holds us tight? Not

loosely, not casually. He holds us tight. There are three places I would like to go to illustrate this. Then before we're done, I have a little illustration. Let's first consider Matthew, chapter 8 and the first four verses. The first example I would like to share with you is the great love of God that will find the sinner in their lost and undone condition. There are three things that go on when He holds us tight: 1) *the great love of God that finds us in the awful condition that we're in*; 2) *He seeks us out and then He reaches back to us in His great mercy to bring us to where He is*; 3) *After He seeks us out and reaches back, He holds us tight*. That's meant to be the experience for every human being. If you're here this evening and you've been saved for a short time or a long time, or if you're here and you don't know God and you came to find out what these people are talking about, this is for you. God wants to hold you tight also.

GOD'S LOVE FOR THE LEPER

Let's read these first four verses. Matthew, chapter 8: "When he was come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him. And, behold, there came a leper and worshipped him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will; be thou clean. And immediately his leprosy was cleansed. And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, show thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them."

A leper. A man with a condition that was a type of sin for us. Unclean. I'm told that he had to cry out when he came near a person who was not afflicted so that they might know that he was unclean. He had to wear some symbolism that people would know that this man was, in their world, a dangerous person. He had, perhaps not in his own carelessness, contracted this disease. In the book of Leviticus, chapters 13-15, it deals with the healing of leprosy. It was quite complicated and involved not only for the person who was afflicted but the dwelling that they lived in. There was a certain ritual and cleansing that they had to go through. If that person were healed, there had to be time to prove it. If they couldn't be healed, they were to be cast out of the community.

Perhaps this person here was one of those. Jesus came down from the mountain. A lot of people followed Him and here came this leper and worshiped Him. Tonight you find that you're lost and that Jesus is not your Savior, and yet you desire to be close to Him and you just don't know how. You might be like how I was; you grew up in church and you sat on the front row and the preacher never told you how to be saved, never told you how to live free from sin. You walked away from that church and you thought, "There's nobody on this

earth that's living free from sin." All you saw were hypocrites in religion.

Saints, we need to live the life so that people will have confidence, not in us, but in God. Great damage has been done to God's reputation in the earth because of religion. Maybe you're like I was in that regard or maybe you know someone who is thinking that way. Let them know there are still a people on Earth who are living free from sin, where this is really important. We're not unkind, we're not legalistic and we love people. Let them know that there's still a place they can come to where they'll hear a message that will set them free. Most people in the world who are searching, like I was, have come to the conclusion that it doesn't exist anymore. We need to open our mouths. Don't presume that the door of the ark is closed and that no one else wants what we have. There are still people in the world today who are looking for what this leper was looking for. The enemy wants to quiet us and close our mouths and cause us to come in here and be afraid of the world. Don't be afraid of the world. Don't love the world, but don't be afraid of it. We're called to serve the world. If somebody didn't serve us, we wouldn't be here.

I knew I was a leper. I used to say that I had one foot in hell. That's how serious I knew my spiritual condition was because of the way I was behaving. I had been raised differently. I knew better. There might be someone that you know who is like this. That would be the leper. The leper evidently was like me, maybe like you. He knew Christ was coming to town. Well, Christ is still coming to town. Christ is IN the town.

I love the three persons of God. The Holy Spirit that goes to where we are even when we're lost and we're in our leprous condition and touches us. God touches us in our leprous condition and invites us back. He says, "Come on back." That's what drew this leper to Christ. Now Jesus, being a high priest and a prophet, should not have touched the leper, because the moment He touched him, He would have become unclean. Do you remember the story of the good Samaritan and the priest who passed by? Evidently the priest had business to do and he didn't want to touch that unclean man on the side of the road. Jesus touched the unclean man, touched the leper. The leper worshiped Him and said, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean."

Jesus put forth His hand and touched him saying, "I will; be thou clean." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. When we bow at an altar of prayer and we're tired of being a leper, and say, "Lord, I'm so sick of being a leper; I'm so sick of the lies they have told me, and I want to walk in truth and I want to be free from sin," in that moment God doesn't send you away. He doesn't say, "Come back in thirty days." Immediately, God touches you and your leprosy is gone. This is the beginning of the "hold me tight." Jesus then told the leper to go and present the gift that Moses had commanded back in Leviticus. That's the first part of this story. When God holds us tight, He draws us even in our unclean condition.

GOD'S LOVE FOR ZACCHAEUS

Now I want to go to Zacchaeus. We'll find him in Luke 19:1-10. This evening we're talking about God's

desire to hold us tight. I love this story. I can find myself up in the tree sometimes. "And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich." He's what they used to call a tax farmer. He would bid for the right to collect taxes from the Roman Empire. And the highest bidder won the right to collect the taxes in that province. They would always bid more than they were entitled to take, because they needed to make a profit. That's one of the reasons why the Jewish people hated these tax collectors. They were sort of independent contractors to the Empire. This is who Zacchaeus was. We know that because later he would restore fourfold what he had taken. He was a thief. The first man was a leper; this man is a thief. We were lepers. Don't tell me you weren't all that bad. We were ALL that bad! All of us. I like to say "but for the grace of God." We are all the same but for the grace of God. The grace of God may have saved the sinner, but otherwise, our righteousness is as filthy rags. We are all the same in that regard but for Christ. Now if there's one here that doesn't know Christ, that's the difference. That's what we want you to consider this evening.

"And he [Zacchaeus] sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up." Aren't you glad that one day God looked up and He saw us in our "sycamore tree"?

"He looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste," because he was already repentant before he climbed up the tree. He knew Jesus would pass by, and what he hoped was that he could spend some time with the Savior. "And came down," why? Because he was repentant.

"And came down, and received him joyfully ... And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham." I am so glad that one day Jesus came and abode in my house. He took up His dwelling in my house. That's why when you wake up late at night and the adversary wants to condemn you and he wants to tell you that you've lost it and you don't have your salvation anymore, you can tell him, "You're a liar and the father of lies. God is still in my dwelling." Saints, this is why we need to be so careful not to be careless with our experience, because carelessness will leave a doubt in us that somehow we are not still able to be close with Him. Lord, help us to be faithful.

"And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner. And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." So we know that he was repenting. "And Jesus said unto him, This day." Not tomorrow. "This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch as he is also a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." Jesus reached back for Zacchaeus.

When we're trying to come close to God and feel Him and have Him hold us tight, just about any of us could feel isolated at any moment in time, for any reason. We might feel just alone. This is the kind of thing I think about Zacchaeus. He felt alone because people hated him. He didn't have any friends, for good reason. This isolation that sometimes a person feels, or this aloneness, or this separateness will divide us from this "hold me tight" Christ. I think that Zacchaeus felt this. Jesus moved with the crowd until He saw this honest sinner. Why? Because he wanted to come down and hold Him tight. It's still the same today. We still serve the same God. The same Christ still wants to hold all of us tight.

ARE YOU FEELING LONELY?

Now we're speaking about this publican who sinned. But you know what? Even after a person forsakes sin and God forgives them, good people can sometimes feel isolated, lonely, disconnected, unsure. One of the things the enemy wants to use more than anything else today is unbelief. He wants to inject you with unbelief. There's no reason for it. You haven't done anything to cause unbelief, and so it's an attack of the enemy. It comes from Satan. He wants to take your faith and replace it with unbelief. It's a terrifying thing, isn't it, for a saint of God to struggle with unbelief? You say, "Saints of God don't struggle with unbelief." I'm not talking about a belief which causes you to forsake God, but this thing that you can't quite put your hand on. This attack on your faith. There was a man who had a son who was not well. Jesus said, "Do you believe that I can heal your son?"

The man said, "Lord, I believe."

Wait a minute now. There's a second half to this. The man continued, "Help thou mine unbelief."

I don't find that Jesus found fault with the man because he confessed that there was some unbelief working on him. What a merciful God! He's not a punishing God. He's not a critical God. He's not a God who wants to hold you at a distance because your belief can't quite take Him in. He's constantly reaching out. "Let me hold you tight. I know you have some unbelief. I know you're struggling with some stuff, but I don't care. Hold me tight." "Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief."

The person, like Zacchaeus, who feels isolated from the crowd sometimes feels like they can't even reach God and that God maybe cannot reach them. They might be surrounded by others who believe or are faithful. Sometimes that makes it even worse. We feel sort of an isolation. We might say, "Well, do you know what? I guess there's no hope for me in the crowd. I guess it must be true. My unbelief is too great. I'm overthrown, I'm cast down." There's still a good Shepherd that turns, that raises the cast sheep. A sheep which is cast is on its back and has no natural ability to right itself. If it remains in that cast position, especially when the weather is bad, it will die. That's why the Shepherd has to be looking out for a sheep which is cast, because they need help to get right. God still is that good Shepherd.

The kingdom of God is full of people who used to be like Zacchaeus and the leper. Full! Now they're not

longer cheats and thieves. They're no longer unclean. But sometimes people still have scars of sin, and those scars of sin can sometimes work on us and act in a way just like sin would have to create a distance between us and God. Now it need not be because God has forgiven us, and He doesn't hold us at a distance. But sometimes we feel that way. That's why I say the kingdom of God is full of people who used to be like Zacchaeus and the leper. We need to remember that so that we have long-suffering one with another. All of this should be helpful to someone who is saying, "You know what, I would like to live like you all, but I just don't know if I can do this. I have unbelief. I have doubt." Evidently other people have felt this way before and God has found a way to bring them into the kingdom.

God wants to hold us tight. He finds us in this sinful condition. Sometimes He finds us sort of isolated from the crowd. In both of these moments, He brings us into the kingdom. Sometimes any of us need to feel the closeness of God, even when we're a servant. I think of Elijah after the 450 prophets of Baal. He felt so alone. He said so. He said, "I am the only one who is left." That's what he felt—and he was a faithful servant and hadn't done anything wrong. But that's how he felt. He fled from the wicked queen and found himself in the cave, sometimes feeling so alone.

God had to come to him and say, "No, no, no. I still have 7,000 who haven't bowed their knees to Baal."

JESUS CRUCIFIED TO HOLD YOU TIGHT

But sometimes we feel that way. I remember another man who hadn't done anything wrong and they put Him on a cross. Before He went to the cross, He was alone in the garden. All of His friends had run away. If there was anyone who ever felt alone and forsaken, I know who it is. They put Him on the cross. When He was on the cross, I think about what He cried out. Now earlier there's a place where He is praying and He says, "Abba, Father," in more than one scripture. *Abba* is an expression in Aramaic which is a familiar expression for the word *father*. You can tell they're holding each other tight when Jesus prays and says, "Abba, Father." But when He's on the cross, what does He say? "My God, my God." He doesn't say "Abba, Father;" He says, "My God. Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? Why have you forsaken me? I can't feel you."

They say that when a person is crucified, the first thing that goes is their sight because the blood drains. The next thing that goes is their hearing. But Jesus couldn't see the people and yet He could perceive that they were there. He could hear in a way, but He couldn't see. So His senses are sort of coming to a close. Can you imagine this? He cries out, "I can't feel you, Father!" But now it's "My God, my God! The One that I normally feel. The One that I normally pray to, Abba, I can't feel Him. I'm searching for God. God, where are you?"

That tells me that sometimes under this extreme stress that we feel that we just can't feel God, we can't hold Him tight. He can hold us tight, but we feel like He's just not holding us tight. I'd like to say that many times it's not sin that causes these separations. I want to speak to the church tonight. It's not sin. But sometimes we feel a separation for different reasons. The same Godhead that saves us will resolve every obstacle,

every separation that we might feel later in life. We have to go back to the same Godhead who saved us, no matter what the problem is and cry, "God, hold me tight."

AN ILLUSTRATION OF HOLDING TIGHT

Now I'd like to illustrate this with the help of some of our brethren:

Bro. Brian, you and your good wife come up here on the platform. Do I have some helpers? There's a chair right here. Sis. Charlie, you are over here and Bro. Brian, you are over there. Sis. Charlie is all of us. She represents anybody here. She's the one who's coming to God and wants God to hold her tight. Bro. Brian represents God, the Father. The Father is the one that Jesus brings us to in a way. If you think of it differently, that's okay. This is how I see it. Jesus was praying to the Father at different times: "Father, forgive them." So Father is involved in the forgiveness of sins just as Jesus is involved in the forgiveness of sins. Sis. Charlie represents all of us and Bro. Brian represents God. The chair represents something between the two of them. Something between us and God. Now in the first place, when we are sinners, this represents sin. But the sin that we committed before we were saved separated us from God. I want to tell you something: Do not believe that even though the world is so callused today and, seemingly, so unconcerned, that there are still not people who want to reach out and hold God tight. Don't let it discourage us that we talk to people and they don't respond. There are people who don't know how to do it, because the world has taken their faith. The spirit of the age has taken their faith. They don't understand the language of salvation. It's up to us to translate this gospel that they might understand there's still a God in heaven who is designed to hold them tight.

Alan Richards represents Jesus. Sis. Charlie prays and says, "I'm so tired of being a leper. I'm so tired of cheating people and lying and double dealing and hiding sin. I'm so tired of that." She cries out because one day she found a place where they were preaching truth and said, "I'm convinced there's still a church on Earth that serves God." Jesus responds and He doesn't delay. He takes that sin and removes it. He takes it as far as the east is from the west. It doesn't come back. It's not going to come back tomorrow; He took it away!

Sis. Charlie and Bro. Brian hold each other tight. No, no, no. I said TIGHT! If it were the spiritual application, they would continue to hold each other tight. Every day of the week and every hour of the day—that how we move through life—Jesus is holding us tight. We desire to hold Jesus tight. We don't want any separation. We don't want loose hugs. We want hold me tight! You can feel love when somebody holds you tight. If I come down and hold a brother loosely and say, "Oh brother, I love you," he's not convinced. If I hold him tight, then he knows I love him and he loves me because we're holding each other tight.

Now let's let the chair represent something different. The Holy Spirit is here also. We'll put the chair between Sis. Charlie and Bro. Brian. Sis. Charlie, for whom her sin was removed as far as the east is from the west, years down the road ... This is showing up in my office.

I know what I'm talking about. Years down the road, something has come up in their life. This no longer represents sin. Something has come up. It could be affecting the marriage, it could be affecting the children, it could be something on the job, it could be something personal. She reaches out for the Father and she just can't quite get close enough, because the chair—the thing—is in the way. She wants to get close to the Father. By the way, He's always reaching out for her. But that chair is in the way. It's not sin. She doesn't need the blood of Christ to remove it. The Holy Spirit shows up. The Holy Spirit takes it away and now they can resume their "hold me tight" relationship. Anything that creates a separation between us and God, the Godhead will resolve it, will deal with it. The Spirit of God will illuminate the solution, He'll help us.

IS CHRIST YOUR IDENTITY?

The world in which we live today is so polarized. I think this might be true in all the countries that are represented here. There's such a polarization between opinions and ideas that it's causing great division and people can't find the center. I believe the reason this is happening—and I believe I have the authority of the gospel for this—is that folks are making something their identity which ultimately is not Christ. The polarization of this side or that side—folks are saying, "This is my identity. This is who I am." This is not just in a political sense; this is happening in a social sense. I identify as a tomato; therefore, you must create laws that protect tomatoes. I know this because I come from California. People are identifying with all kinds of ways. You weren't born that way. You might even be a 12-year-old, but somebody is telling you that you're a tomato. You're not a tomato—you're a little boy or you're a little girl! You can make believe that you're a tomato, but please do not ask me to teach my children that you're a tomato. This is a humanistic spirit—the human is the highest object in the universe and everything we do is for the ultimate satisfaction of the human.

That can even make its way into the church. It'll morph, it'll change. In the church it will become, "Brother, I believe I have the right ..." Every time you hear that, beware of what follows. You won't want to change the identity that we feel so strongly about because you'll fight for it. What you fight for, you don't want to give up. So make sure you fight for the right thing. Sometimes in the church, people will say, "I feel strongly identified with X. I'll fight for it." But guess what? Ultimately, that identity has lost sight with the true identity. What did Jesus say? "If I am lifted up, I will draw all men unto me." My identity needs to be in Christ. I might have strong feelings or opinions about certain things, but they cannot be my identity. The identity in Christ is the common denominator of the church. What's happened is that this country has lost the common denominator that holds us together. It has created all these sub-identities. It's divisive. If it makes its way into the church, it will divide even the body of Christ. The glue that holds this country together is the identity in Christ. When I read how this country was founded and I see what the ideas were around the founding, they were creating a common denominator for what could be common to everybody. But when you

take that out of the equation, there is no more common denominator, neither in the world or for the church.

In the church, if we allow some identity to divide us, that's what that represents. You might think I'm holding on to God, that I'm holding God tight, but no, there's an identity there that has become an idol unto me. It's in the way. If that is the case, we need the Holy Spirit to remove this false idol because I want to hold God tight.

Zacchaeus wanted to be held tight. The leper wanted to be held tight. Psalm 23 and we'll close. Is there anybody here who just wants God to hold them tight? "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Why? Because He holds me tight. "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" and I'm going to be so happy to be held tight. Lord bless you this evening.

CONCLUSION

Our prayer is if you have a need and there is something in your life which is keeping you from holding God tight, the Holy Spirit can get it out of the way. Don't despair. If you know someone in your family who is suffering from something, tell them the good news that God wants to hold them tight.

Not too long ago, a mother was at her wit's end. She just couldn't take it anymore. She was in the daughter's house. The mother just started breaking down and weeping. Instead of the daughter trying to help her mom, she just held her tight. As her mom was shaking, they told me that they held each other tight for 45 minutes and nobody said anything. Sometimes you need to let stuff finish. Sometimes the trial that you suffered with for so long—just let it finish and let God hold you tight. The mother reported after that, "I felt so much better." Now there's a connection that was very tenuous before. Now there's a connection that is growing back. All her daughter did was, she held her tight. When you hold tight, there is no judgment. "Well, you should have done this, you should have done that." No, no, no. God just holds us tight. I realize there's a place for justice and a place for judgment. That's how this relationship begins—the justice of God finds us guilty. †

POSTAGE RATES ON THE RISE!

We are sure that our readers know that the cost of publishing this magazine continues to rise. Postage rates have been increasing at an alarming rate. We do not charge for the magazine. We depend on the generosity of our readers to help us in our endeavor to send this gospel messenger to all the world. Please remember this ministry in your giving. May our Lord bless you abundantly as you do so.

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER



ALL THE THINGS YOU GAVE US

A Bible Lesson by Sis. Rebecca Bland

"Time for family devotions," called my mother. "Hurry up! Daddy's ready to read."

We children knew better than to play around. If our mother had to call us again, there would be consequences. None of us wanted to miss play time the next day.

My younger sisters and I gathered around our father in the living room. He sat with his Bible on his lap, opened to the scripture he had chosen to read.

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking," my father began. He was reading from First Peter, his favorite book of the Bible.

He paused and looked up at us. "Do you know what 'malice' is?" he asked. We shook our heads, and so he told us. "Malice is 'meanness'," he said. "We are told to lay aside meanness. We should always be kind to each other. That's what the Lord wants us to do."

My father continued reading until he reached the end of the chapter. Now and then, he stopped to ask us a question or to explain something. After my father closed the Bible and laid it on the table, we knelt to pray.

"Let's let Wilma pray first," said my mother. "She's about to fall asleep." Wilma was only four years old, and it was a little past her bedtime.

Wilma prayed a short prayer. "Dear Jesus," she prayed, "Thank you for this nice day, and thank you for Mommy and Daddy. Give us all a good night's rest. Help me be a good girl tomorrow. In Jesus' name, Amen." She leaned her head against my mother's shoulder and fell asleep.

"It's your turn, Twila," said my mother.

Twila opened her eyes and peeked at me. I peeked back at her. I knew what she was thinking about. Dad had talked to us recently about putting more thought into our prayers. Usually, the prayers we prayed in family devotions were not much longer than the prayer Wilma had just prayed.

"You need to pay better attention when you pray," Dad had said. "You need to think what you are saying, and not just repeat the same words each time."

We knew our dad was right. Even though I was only eight years old, and Twila was only six, we knew about prayer. Our Sunday school teachers had taught us about prayer. We had read Bible stories about men and women who prayed. We had heard people pray at church. Our family even signed up for a half-hour slot in our congregation's prayer room each Sunday morning. But when it came time for us children to pray, we could not think of much to say. We were amazed that our parents could

fill up the remainder of the half-hour with their prayers.

I thought of all these things as I closed my eyes again and waited for Twila to begin her prayer.

“Dear Jesus,” Twila began. “Thank you for all your blessings.” She paused, and then went on. “Thank you for the flowers. Thank you for the grass and the trees. Thank you for the sun and the rain.”

Twila is trying hard to pray a longer prayer tonight, I thought to myself.

Twila went on. “Thank you for the animals,” she prayed. “Thank you for the cows and the pigs and the chickens. Thank you for the ducks and the geese. Thank you for the rabbits, the turtles, and the deer.”

I wondered what my parents were thinking. I wondered if my dad was happy that Twila was praying a longer prayer than usual.

Twila continued her prayer. “Thank you for all the food we have to eat. Thank you for the corn and green beans. Thank you for tomatoes, onions, carrots, and strawberries. Thank you for cornbread, and gravy, and mashed potatoes.”

I was beginning to worry. Even though Twila was only six years old, I knew she could think of a lot more kinds of food. What if she never finished her prayer? What if our family devotions went on all night long?

Twila drew a deep breath and continued, “Thank you for watermelons, cantaloupes, and pumpkins,” she said. “Thank you for bread and butter. Thank you for cherries and ice cream. Thank you for catsup and mustard and ...” She paused, thinking.

At that moment, Dad’s voice broke in, loud and firm, “And for all the things You gave us!” he said.

“And for all the things You gave us,” repeated Twila. “Amen.”

I let out my breath in a relieved sigh. Twila’s long prayer was ended at last.

My prayer came next. It was not a very long one. Twila’s idea for a lengthy prayer had not worked well. I didn’t know how to do any better.

My parents prayed next. I listened to their prayers and wondered if I would ever be able to pray like they did.

As I grew older, however, I understood more about the importance of prayer. I ran into more and more situations for which I had need of God’s grace and help. I learned that I needed to pray in private on a daily basis—not just in family devotions. This is something that every Christian needs to do.

Children, you may not be able to think of a lot of things to say when you pray. That is all right. The most important thing is that you realize prayer is talking to God, and that Christians need to talk to God every day.

Although it is very important to thank God for His blessings when we pray, it is not necessary to try to name each one. It is not possible, because God gives us more blessings than we can count.

Long ago, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. Jesus gave them an “example prayer” to help them understand what they should say when they prayed. He told them to start out by telling God that

they loved and respected Him. He told them to ask God to help them do His will here on this earth. He told them to ask God for the things they needed. He told them to ask God to help them be loving and forgiving. He told them to ask God to keep them from evil.

Jesus’ prayer was not a long one, but it was a thoughtful prayer. He meant every word with all of His heart. That is the kind of prayer God wants to hear.

Our wise saying this month comes from Proverbs 15:8 which says, *The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight.*

An “upright” person is one who loves God and keeps His commandments. Children can be upright, just as well as adults. Children’s prayers can please God, even if they are not very long. The prayers that matter are those that come from hearts that are pure and sincere. Those are the prayers in which God delights.

Activity

See if you can unscramble each group of letters to discover a blessing for which we should be thankful.

1. DOFO
2. GLITHONC
3. THEELRS
4. SEPTARN
5. TOVANAILS

Answers to Last Month’s Activity

1. “Offer the sacrifices of **righteousness**, and put your trust in the Lord” (Psalm 4:5).
2. “And they that know thy **name** will put their trust in thee: for thou, Lord, hast not **forsaken** them that seek thee” (Psalm 9:10).
3. “Some trust in **chariots**, and some in **horses**: but we will remember the **name** of the Lord our God” (Psalm 20:7).
4. “Trust in the Lord with all thine **heart**, and lean not unto thine own **understanding**” (Proverbs 3:5).
5. “Every word of God is **pure**: he is a **shield** unto them that put their trust in him” (Proverbs 30:5). †

STEPS HEAVENWARD

By the late R. L. Berry

Chapter VI

Have Faith in God

SINCE YOU have started in the service of God, young convert, it is of the utmost importance that you begin with a real, strong faith in God. The whole plan of salvation is based on faith, because God is unseen, because Christ is not seen, and because the Holy Spirit, who is to be our leader and our guide, cannot be seen. We have God’s Word, which is truth, and we have the testimonies of the brethren that the Bible is true; but the power that renews and converts us is a thing that cannot be seen. The results of that power can be seen, but the power itself cannot. Jesus said,

speaking of the new birth: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). There is nothing at all strange about this, however, because there are many powers that we know exist and yet we do not know very much about them and never have seen them. We know there is a power called electricity, but no one ever saw electricity. We know the growing plant has power to push up through the soil, and yet no one ever saw that power. Did you ever see an explosion? What did you see? You saw the dirt and rocks flying, but did you see anything making them fly? No, the power, the force that made the dirt and rocks fly, could not be seen; the effects of that power could be seen, but the power itself was invisible.

So it is with God and the power of God. God is, Christ is, the Holy Spirit is, they exist, and reign in heaven and over all the earth; but we cannot see them. Christ has all power in heaven and in earth, but we cannot see His power. We may see someone in prayer to God for forgiveness. By and by we see him sit up and a glow of love and light and grace shine out in his face and we see that a wonderful change has come over him, and yet we saw no power coming down on him. We see wicked men changed into good men, see sinners made into saints, and we know that a great power has made that change—and yet it all was invisible to our eye. It exists, although unseen.

The idea many people have of faith is a wrong one. They seem to think it is some sort of a thing, something like feeling of soul, some religious exercise, or some gracious, inward disposition toward God, a something that you, once you have it, can look at and rejoice over and use as a sort of coin to the storehouse of God. Well, it is not like that at all. It is not something you can handle, it is not something tangible, it is not a feeling nor a disposition. It is simply believing God.

If you asked, "How may I know I have faith in God?" I would reply, In just the same way as you know you have sight. How do you know you have sight? Do you shut your eyes and study whether you have sight or not? No, you see things, and the seeing is proof enough to you that you have sight. If you believe anything you have faith; for just as sight is only seeing, so faith is only believing. The essential thing about seeing is that you see a thing as it is; and the only essential thing about belief is to believe the thing as it is. The virtue does not lie in your believing, but in the thing that you believe. If you believe the truth, you are saved; if you believe a lie, you will be damned. The act of believing in both cases is exactly the same, but the things that are believed are exactly opposite, and it is this which makes the difference in the results. You were saved by faith; not that you will be kept by faith, not that faith itself will keep you, but faith will link you to Christ, who will do the keeping.

Good people all down the ages have tried to put forth a definition of faith. Here is Paul's: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Mrs. Phoebe Palmer's is, "Faith is taking God at His Word, relying unwaveringly upon His truth." John Wesley asked a godly woman to

give a definition of faith, and she said, "It is taking God at His Word"; and a little girl is said to have put it, "It is taking God at His Word and asking no questions about it." All these mean the same thing and show that faith is not some feeling but a strong confidence, a strong conviction that what God said He means, and is relied on and implicitly believed without a doubt. Faith in God is believing God's Word; it is believing that God either has done something for us, or will do something for us, and then taking our hands off, ceasing to worry, and just trusting Him to keep His promises. And as long as you believe that God has done something for you or will do something for you, according to His Word, you may know that you do have faith in God. The thing to do is to keep on believing that God has saved you, that He has made you a new creature, and that He will keep you every day from sin and evil.

It will be well, early in your Christian life, to make a clear distinction between faith and feeling. If you are not careful you will make a great deal more ado over your feelings than over your faith, and you will be more anxious about the way you feel than about your faith. Faith and feeling are two entirely distinct things, though they are of very close kin. One is the fruit of the other. Faith is not feeling, but faith produces feeling. The Christian religion is a feeling religion, that is, it is felt and has a great deal to do with one's emotions; yet the foundation of it is not feeling, but faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When one does believe, he feels, sooner or later (the time does not matter), the good effects of what the Lord did for him. It is useless to try to feel better when the means to a better feeling are neglected. Faith brings, sooner or later, and most certainly, the feeling that all is well with you and God. But even after you do thus feel, do not place dependence in the feelings you have, but continue to walk by faith. Keep your faith strong.

Never, young convert, allow yourself to make the lame excuse made by some lame Christians, that you cannot be expected to do very much for the Lord nor to live very devoted because you have no faith, or because your faith is very weak. There is no need for one's faith being weak, if we will look at this question rightly. And really you cannot afford to be weak in faith, and there is no good reason for such a state. Banish from your mind such weakening thoughts as you cannot be strong in faith; declare you will believe. Put your will to working for your best interests; say to yourself, "I can believe. Lord, I will believe, I do believe," and continue to say this till you are really believing. Insist on believing God and His Word, even though every feeling tries to cause you to doubt Him.

The blessed experience that you have just received from God is to be kept by faith. It is not an experience that you will forever afterward have despite of everything, but it is to be kept up moment by moment by faith. The Christian experience is not a thing to be picked up at a certain place and forever after possessed, but it is a life to be lived. And the only way it can be lived is by faith. "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith," says Paul to the Ephesians (Ephesians 3:17). "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him" (Colossians 2:6). How did Christ

come into your heart? He came in when you believed. How shall He dwell in your heart? By faith. In other words. (Please give close attention here.) In other words, as long as you turn from sin and believe in your heart that Christ saves you, you are saved. That is, if you hold the same attitude toward sin as you did at the time you repented, and abhor it and forsake it and will have no more to do with it nor with the devil, and if you hold the same attitude toward Jesus as you did at that time and desire that He be your Savior, then you can let your faith go out full and strong in God that you are a child of God and that all is well with your soul.

You should learn at the commencement of your experience just the use to make of your will in believing. Your will is you, the real man of you, the real personal soul, the "I"; by it you rule over things, make decisions, and compel obedience of your body and all your faculties. If you decide to go to town today, you go, whether your head aches or what happens; that is, your body may murmur at your going to town at this particular time, but if you decide to go, you go, and when you arrive there, it is just as real as if you had felt disposed to go in the first place.

Many Christians have sat down and weakly let doubts ruin their peace of mind and cause them untold trouble and anguish, whereas if they had used their will-power they could have believed and become strong in the Lord.

As an illustration of the right use of the will in believing, take the one just mentioned—going to town when one does not feel disposed to go. Learn to believe, young Christian, when you do not feel disposed to believe. This may sound strange to you—to ask you to believe under such conditions. But that is just exactly what you will be obliged to learn to do, if you would have peace and joy along the way to heaven. "But will such believing be real?" you may ask. "Will such believing be right?" you may even ask. It is a fact that many have been kept from gaining a victory by faith because they thought that it would be wrong to try to believe when their feelings were all against it. To obtain a little light on this point, let us take another illustration. You know that the Bible tells us to "search the Scriptures." You know this is a command of God's. But you are tired and do not feel inclined to read the Bible. What then? Neglect it simply because you do not feel disposed to read it? No, that is not the way one should do. Get the Bible and read it, meditate, and search; and, behold, soon you will begin to enjoy something that, according to your feelings, you thought you would not or could not enjoy at all when you began. It is so with believing. When you feel as though you can no longer believe, on account of trials, or bad feelings, or temptations, then resolve in your heart you will believe anyway. You may rest assured that such faith in God when your feelings rebel will be most pleasing to the Lord, who knows that anyone can believe when all seems fair and well, but that it takes courage and decision to believe when all is dark and discouraging.

Remember, God cannot lie. If He has gone to the trouble of sending Jesus to save the world, and to the trouble of sending out ministers to preach the gospel, and to the trouble of convicting you of sin and begging

you to come to Him, and if He has forgiven your sins, rest assured that He is intensely interested in your continuing in the holy way. When an honest man says he will do a thing, he does it; following the saying is the doing. So it is with God: when God would do anything, He first says it through His Word, and when a man comes to believe that Word, God always does for him what He says He will. God has said that He will keep that which we commit to Him, and Peter tells us that we are to commit the keeping of our souls to Him as unto a faithful Creator, (I Peter 4:19). God will always keep you if you trust Him.

Abraham "staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; ... being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform" (Romans 4:20, 21). The apostle Paul says of faith, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked" (Ephesians 6:16). At your feet will fall harmless all the fiery temptations of the devil if you hold up the precious shield of faith. †

BIBLE LESSON OF THE MONTH

GEMS FROM THE BOOK OF ROMANS

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Scriptures: Romans 14:17; Mark 1:14, 15; 9:1; Luke 8:1; 16:16; 17:20, 21; Daniel 2:44; John 3:3.

Romans 14:17 For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

Mark 1:14 Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

15 And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Mark 9:1 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power.

Luke 8:1 And it came to pass afterward, that he went throughout every city and village, preaching and showing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him.

Luke 16:16 The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.

Luke 17:20 And when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation:

21 Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.

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

John 3:3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

Memory Verse: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.—Romans 14:17.

Aim: To show that the kingdom of God is not something yet in the future, but is a present reality.

INTRODUCTION

“The notion that the Messiah would establish a literal kingdom upon the earth originated with the Jews. Many of them placed literal interpretations upon those prophecies which relate to the coming of Christ, and as a result they expected him to establish a temporal throne, subdue the nations, and restore again the kingdom of Israel. This gross error led them to reject Christ, oppose his spiritual kingdom, and consent unto his death. Because he did not meet their expectations, he became a stumbling-block to them. At one time they tried to ‘take him by force, and make him a king,’ but he departed from them” (John 6:15).—H. M. Riggle, *The Kingdom of God*.

Jesus was born a King, and He said He had a kingdom: “My kingdom is not of this world.” But He had no plans for a literal kingdom, certainly, not one of a thousand years. Since Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be born again of the Word and the Spirit—John 3:5—to enter the kingdom, we understand His kingdom is spiritual and not literal. We trust the study of this lesson will be a blessing to you.

MEDITATIONS

WHAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT—Romans 14:17—But righteousness—We understand by Paul’s words that the kingdom of God is not “meat and drink.” He is saying that it is not a literal kingdom. Then he tells us what it is: “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” This lets us know that there are different phases of the kingdom. What is described here is the experience phase, which is obtained by an experience of salvation.

JESUS PREACHING—Mark 1:14, 15—The time—John was the forerunner of Jesus. After John was put in prison, Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. Part of His message was: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.” What He was talking about was the prophecy of Daniel 2:44: “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.” And He did! It is at hand now; it is not yet out in the future.

JESUS SPEAKS AGAIN—Mark 9:1—Some standing here—There is no one who was standing there still alive today! The kingdom came with power on the day of Pentecost.

AFTER BEING IN A PHARISEE’S HOME—Luke 8:1—He went—While in the home a woman washed Jesus’ feet by wetting them with her tears and drying them with her hair. Jesus forgave her of her sins. Later, Jesus and the twelve went through a number of towns and He preached to them the good news of the kingdom of God. He did not tell the people it was way out in the future.

OLD COVENANT ENDED—Luke 16:16—Since that time—Jesus brought in the New Covenant, and with it came the good news of the kingdom of God. We understand from this verse that it takes putting forth

some effort to enter into the kingdom of God. Satan will do all he can to keep people from entering the kingdom of God, but they can if they really desire to. We also see from this verse that there were those who were pressing their way in. A question is in order: How could souls be entering into the kingdom of God if it did not exist?

NOT WHAT YOU EXPECT—Luke 17:20, 21—When He was demanded—The Pharisees demanded of Jesus to know when the kingdom of God should come. They were expecting a literal kingdom set up there in their country with a literal king sitting on a literal throne. Jesus told them that the kingdom of God was not that kind of a kingdom, and they would never see such a kingdom.

A quote from Adam Clarke: “The kingdom of God, the glorious religion of the Messiah, does not come in such a way as to be discerned only by sagacious critics, or is only to be seen by those who are scrupulously watching for it; it is not of such a nature as to be confined to one place, so that men might say of it, Behold it is only here, or only there.” With the words “within you,” Jesus is speaking of the experience phase of the kingdom.

FOUR EARTHLY KINGDOMS—Daniel 2:44—Shall the God of heaven—The image had four parts: gold, silver, brass, and iron and clay. The four kingdoms: Babylon, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman. There was a fifth kingdom! The stone spoken of in verse 34 represented Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God. Note: It was the stone that struck the image on his feet and legs. This was the fourth literal kingdom, the Roman, so this was to happen during the reign of the Roman kingdom. Jesus Christ came into this world during the rule of the Roman kingdom, so this lets us know when “the kingdom of God came with power.” Those who put this yet out in the future are misrepresenting the truth of the Word of God.

A SPIRITUAL KINGDOM—John 3:3—Born again—As was stated in the Introduction, Jesus told Nicodemus one must be born of the Word and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God. Thus the kingdom is a spiritual kingdom. If it were a literal kingdom, one would have to have a physical birth to enter it, but the Scriptures inform us that flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God.

CONCLUSION

I mentioned earlier that there were different phases to the kingdom of God: in the universal phase, all are in it. “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity” (Matthew 13:41). The phase that the redeemed are in are those that have been born again. This phase and the church are the same! Christ is King of the kingdom, and Christ is the Head of the church. The experience phase, Romans 14:17: “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.” “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). The eternal phase: “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom of God prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

1. What is the duration of the kingdom of God?
2. How does one get into the kingdom?
3. Will there be a literal kingdom of a thousand years on Earth?
4. What literal kingdom was ruling when Jesus was born?
5. What does “the stone” in Daniel 2:34 symbolize? †



These questions and answers are taken from *The Way of Truth Question and Answer Book, 1946-2001*.



QUESTION: What is the difference between the Old and the New Testament?

ANSWER: If you speak of the books of the Bible, the Old Testament books were written before the coming of Jesus Christ to earth. They deal, to a great extent, with the Hebrews. They contain some laws that pertained to the literal nation of Israel that are no longer binding on God's people. Also, there are many prophecies in regard to Jesus Christ.

The New Testament is the grouping of the books written after the resurrection of Jesus and sets forth His teachings, as well as those who accepted Him as Lord and Savior.

If you speak in regard to the two Covenants, the Old Testament is the Covenant God gave the Hebrews. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New and better covenant (Hebrews 8:6).

What is the difference? Well, a full answer would be too long for this column, but much of the Old Covenant dealt with a literal nation, with promises of literal blessings, the land of Canaan, for instance, as well as spiritual blessings; with animal sacrifices, certain holy days and seasons, etc. The New Covenant does not bind a lot of these laws upon God's people, spiritual Israel, today. God's people today are the redeemed saints of God, scripturally called the Church of God, not a literal nation.

Further, many of the literal sacrifices and holy seasons of the Old Covenant were types and shadows of Christ and His redeeming work. Today we have the reality of what those things in the Old Covenant were types of.

QUESTION: James 5:13, “Is any among you afflicted, let him pray.” What is afflicted?

ANSWER: The word *afflicted* covers the thought of pain, stress, or suffering of any kind. As the next two verses deal with sickness and disease of the body, we would think verse 13 is dealing more with mental pain or suffering that comes as a result of false accusations,

trials, persecutions, etc.—in these you are to pray: if you are sick, call for the elders of the church.

QUESTION: If there never was sin in heaven why will heaven pass away and be destroyed?

ANSWER: Heaven, that is, where God's throne is, will not pass away or be destroyed. The heavens that are to pass away with a great noise, to melt with fervent heat, are the starry heavens which are material matter as the earth, possibly in somewhat a different form, but nevertheless material.

QUESTION: Did Judas Iscariot who betrayed our Lord partake of the holy communion before he came to die?

ANSWER: What we refer to as the Lord's Supper was only observed one time before Judas hanged himself. That was in the upper room while Jesus and the Twelve were there for the Passover. It is my understanding that Jesus did wash Judas' feet, as this was done before they ate the Passover meal, but Judas left before the Master instituted the “Lord's Supper.” Therefore, Judas did not have part in it.

QUESTION: Do Christians have the knowledge to rightly divide the Word? Should they say, “The Spirit will show me what is right”? Or would it be proper and right to ask a true minister of God to explain the Word to them?

ANSWER: Some Christians have more knowledge than others. Some people were born and reared in Christian homes; therefore, they have a better understanding of the Word when they get saved than some, but all have to be taught! When born into this world we know nothing, as it were; we must learn as we go along. Some things we are taught by word of mouth, some things by example.

When a person does become a true Christian he will learn some things by the study of the Word, but there will be some things he will not understand and will need a minister or someone more advanced in spiritual knowledge to explain to him.

If this were not true there would be no need of the gift of teaching, which is one of the gifts of the Spirit. The Spirit does reveal the truth to people, but many times He does this not directly to the person but through a minister or a teacher.

If the Spirit taught everyone directly about everything, there would be no need for the “Question Box.”

Some people who insist that the Spirit teaches them directly and that they need not ask anyone, have error with which they are not willing to part. It pays to be humble and to have a spirit that is always willing to learn from other true saints of God.

QUESTION: What is the evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit? Many teach that it is tongues. Is any of the so-called speaking in tongues we hear so much about today real and from God?

ANSWER: The evidence is the power to live a true Christian life, bearing the fruit of the Spirit as revealed in Galatians 5:22, 23.

There is a true gift of languages. When it is manifest it will be in the true body of Christ. I personally do not know of any person who has the true gift of languages. In fact, what need is there of the gift where everyone speaks the same language? (There would be no need for the gift of healing if no one were sick.) When true men of God go into a land where they cannot speak the native tongue, then there is need of such a gift. When false “tongues” preachers go into these lands they have to get an interpreter. Why? If they had a true gift they could preach to them in their own language. This is the purpose of the gift, if I understand rightly. †



Dear Young People,

Psalm 100:5 says, “For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”

We are blessed to experience God’s goodness. To say that God is good means that God always acts in accordance to what is right, true, and

good. The fact that God is good means that He has no evil in Him. His intentions and motivations are always good. He always does what is right, and the outcome of His plan is always good. His Word teaches that God’s goodness extends from His nature to everything that He does. It’s a privilege to serve and trust God.

We trust these thoughts taken from a young people’s service on the topic of “God’s Goodness” will be a blessing.

—Bro. Doug

GOD IS GOOD TO ME BECAUSE I CAN TRUST HIM

By Sis. Cassie Gossard

HAS ANYONE ever said to you, “I know you better than you know yourself”? I think about that sometimes; how can someone know more about me than me? I am me, and I spend all my time with me. And it begs the question: How much do we actually know about ourselves?

For those of you who don’t know, I’m a science person. I love studying and observing God’s world and what He created. But one of the things that has eluded scientists for a long time is ourselves, and how our minds work. People have tried, psychologists continually strive to explain away our minds, but it is such a subjective topic, because every person is different. The human mind and our being in general are so complex. Physically we are relatively easy to figure out because scientists can poke and get a response that they can see and observe. But when it comes down to us—who we are, our soul, consciousness,



personality—that is something we can’t really measure or observe. You can’t look into a person’s mind and see all their emotions and thoughts and everything that makes them, them. Our thinking and consciousness can get so intricate. Your mind is always thinking—what am I going to make for dinner, writing a paper, solving a math problem, planning out a vacation, or focusing on the noises around you. You can be laser focused on one of these tasks, but in the back of your mind, you are contemplating everything. You have 50 different railroads of thought in your mind, all going in different directions, at different speeds, with different cargo. Or you can think of it as being in the corner of a huge room with a candle, doing a task, and meanwhile in the darkness (background), a whole factory of thoughts and feelings is running. Thoughts and emotions can get processed so rapidly and things can get so confusing in our heads. My mind is always changing in small ways; my thinking and personality are not permanent or unchanging, depending on new information and new experiences. I’m changing all the time.

So, to go back to our original question: How much do I actually know about myself? Well, I can definitely say that sometimes I don’t know myself. I can’t see all the aspects of me. I don’t sometimes see my habits, parts of my personality, my shortcomings, victories, or my emotions very clearly. Too much is happening in my mind and changing too quickly for me to catch on to some things. I express all of this to say that I’m so glad that I don’t have to put my trust in myself. I’m so thankful that I can put my trust and my life into the Almighty’s hand. Like I was just explaining, I’m not even capable of understanding some things about me—and I am me; you would think that I would know more about me than any other thing, but that’s just not the truth. I’m not going to put my trust in my human thinking when I can’t even fully understand my thinking sometimes; when it can change at a moment’s notice. But God is not like me. He sees and knows and understands and is stable—Someone we can rely on. We can build our lives on Him without fear of Him letting us crumble or fall. We can trust Him with all that we have—our thoughts, feelings, worries, rights, happiness—everything. If I, Lord forbid, didn’t have God to trust with all of that stuff, it would fall on me to carry. And how could I ever be comfortable or secure holding all that stuff up when my mind is such a maze sometimes? I want God to have that job. I trust Him, and I know He will take care of it and can do abundantly more than I will ever comprehend.

To end, let me leave you with a verse: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

God is good because I can trust Him with my everything! †

OUT OF BOX 88

I am online with you every service and appreciate being a part of the congregation. You have my support in every way. I appreciate all the good laborers there, and the dedicated young people. Wonderful! So glad I found you.
—S. S., Alabama

Perfectly Joined Together

2023 Hagerstown Convention Message by Bro. Darrell Sanford



WE WILL BEGIN by reading I Corinthians 1:10: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.” The title of our message is, “Perfectly Joined Together.”

I want to share this, Saints of God, just as a matter-of-fact type message. The things we’re going to share with you today are just a matter of fact. We’re just going to look at the facts. We’re going to look at what the Bible says. This is not the way it ought to be. This is really the way it is. I understand it’s the way it ought to be in some circles, because it doesn’t exist, or it’s not being manifested as it should. But this is it! What are we supposed to do? Speak the same thing. What are we supposed to be speaking? The same thing. What is that same thing? Sound doctrine; the true message, not just anything.

THE COMMON SALVATION

We read in Jude 1:3 about “the common salvation”: “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation ...” One salvation is common to all. It delivers. It washes from sin. It frees us from bondage. It breaks the chains. It fills us with the Holy Spirit. It does all of those things. It enables us to live a holy life. We’ll come back to finish this thought a little later.

What does the common salvation do? Titus 2:11, 12: “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men [It’s for the rich and the poor, the up and the down, the in and the out. It’s for everybody. We are saved by grace through faith, but what does that grace do? It teaches us something.], Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” It’s a common salvation. I don’t care who you are or where you are. If you have that salvation, this is what you’re taught to do. If we’re not teaching this, we’re wrong. If we’re not teaching to resist the enemy, to deny ungodliness and worldliness, to live soberly, godly, and righteously right now in this present world, we don’t have the common salvation.

Why is this important? Because we’re looking for something. The grace of God is teaching us to live holy and righteously in this world, because we’re “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13). We’re expecting. We know it’s coming, so we’re being sober and watching ourselves. We’re holding to the truth, and we’re not slacking up. We’re not compromising because we’re expecting Christ to return. He’s coming back for what? A glorious church, without spot, without blemish, or any such thing.

Verse 14 of Titus 2 says, “Who gave himself for us [Christ gave everything so we could be free. He gave

His all. He gave His life. He poured Himself out.], that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people [a people set apart. He doesn’t share with anyone. He doesn’t share them with sin and disobedience of the devil or with Babylon and false religion. They’re His own people.] zealous of good works.” God help us to be zealous of good works; not just living holy, but those good works, which I’ll get to in a moment. Verse 15: “These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.” Don’t let anyone make light of this, because this is sound. This is the gospel.

Again, in Jude 1:3, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” It was once delivered, once for all time. There’s no 1.1 upgrade to it. There’s no 2.1 upgrade to it. It was once delivered to the saints forever. That same gospel has not changed. So when we read in I Corinthians 1:10 that we all speak the same thing, that’s what Paul was talking about.

DOCTRINE IS IMPORTANT

Saints of God, we have a doctrine. Doctrine is important. There are three elements to God and three elements to His church. Without those three elements, we don’t have a church. Those three elements are *love*, *truth*, and *holiness*. We have to have all three. We could expand upon those, but we have to have love, because God is love. Love is the first thing we encounter when we meet God. We meet the love of God. That’s one thing we don’t have to be taught. We may have to be taught some things concerning love, but God teaches us love, because He puts it in our hearts when we get saved. We turn around and love the people we didn’t even know.

I came out of the world. You’ve heard my testimony before. I was playing in a band. I had long hair. I was a druggie (drug addict). I came and got saved, and I still looked like that when I knelt down and got saved. My wife got saved that same night. We weren’t married at that time, but we both got saved that night. I stood up from there looking just like that guy on the street that I was, and I turned around and looked at all those people. All of them were dressed right. They were holy people, and I just loved them. The love of God! I was one with them, even though I still didn’t have the knowledge that I needed. The love of God united our hearts together. We have to have the love of God. We have to have the truth. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” We can’t compromise on truth. We must have holiness. We have the spirit of holiness in our hearts.

We must speak the same thing, “and that there be no divisions among you ...” How many divisions are we

allowed? No divisions! We can't help it if people don't like us. We can't help it if people don't want to be with us. I can't help it if somebody doesn't want to be with me. But do you know what's allowed? None! No divisions among the holy people, no divisions among those who have the common salvation, no divisions among those who have that one faith once delivered unto the saints of God. Can we do that? Of course, we can do that if we follow the Book: "... but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10).

WE CAN ALLOW NO MORE DIVISIONS

We know that the saints in these scriptures were having some issues. They were really having a lot of personality issues. They were following different people that appealed to them. They had carnality going on, and that's what spurred a lot of that. To save time, we won't read it, but in I Corinthians 3:1-4, we can sort of get a grip on what was going on with that. This lets us know that we have to be one. We cannot allow divisions. Divisions have happened in the past in all kinds of places, but Saints of God, let us make a rule on ourselves: *no more divisions*. There's no need for it. The Bible gives us ways to deal with issues and things that come up, because things will come up.

When I got saved, I was unified with the people of God. I had the unity of the Spirit with the people of God. I was unified with them in love. So what's the big deal? Why can't we just all get along? Well, there's the evil one called the devil. He hates everything we stand for. He wants to destroy us and to destroy souls. He doesn't want the people who are lost out there to have a place to come to. He doesn't want anybody to be able to go out and reach them, so he wars against this. He wars against the church and our unity.

Sometimes we're going to disagree on things. Peter said something to that effect in II Peter 3:16. He said that Paul has talked about some things that are hard to be understood. Everything's not easy. Some things are difficult to be understood, but that doesn't mean we have to divide over those things. All of this talk about unity and oneness and fellowship is very important. That's why we're preaching on it, but the very most important reason that the church is here is for the salvation of souls. We have to endeavor to keep the church on track so we can reach souls. The big issue is reaching souls. We must have love. We must proclaim truth, we must be holy, but all of that is so that we can carry that out to the lost world and reconcile them back to God.

Saints, when I came and got saved, I wasn't thinking about any of this church business. I didn't know anything about it. I wasn't thinking about unity and oneness, etc. I was torn up. I needed help. I just knew God was dealing with me. I turned to my girlfriend (my wife now) who was standing next to me, and I said, "I got to have this." She knew God had been dealing with me for several months. I went to the altar and poured my heart out to God. I had to get that weight off me. God let me see myself. I'd been that way for years, but I didn't see myself. All I saw were the good times and the delusion that I was under. Satan had me under delusion, and I thought I was having a good time. Even

though I was feeling unbearable pain at times, mentally and spiritually, I was just having a good time. I was playing music and doing what I wanted to do, and then, lo and behold, about six months before I got saved, I started thinking differently. Things started to affect me, and it built and it built and it built up until February 10, 1980, when I went to the altar and poured my heart out to God. The difference was, I saw myself, and I felt my sins. I felt all the hatred and malice that I had. I didn't manifest hatred and malice to people. They didn't think I was a hateful person, but there was hatred in my heart. There was no forgiveness down in my heart towards people. There was untold sin I was carrying around, but when God let me see what was there, it was a revelation to me. I had to do something about it.

WE ARE IN A WARFARE

Saints of God, we're in a warfare. One brother used to sing, "It's a battlefield, Brother, not a recreation room." We have joy, peace, and happiness, but we're in a battle. We're going to have to fight the battle. Philippians 1:27, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for [what's really important] the faith of the gospel." The teachings of the gospel will deliver people from their sins and sanctify their nature. The gospel will give them grace to live holy. It will bring righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost into their hearts. We're striving together, not against one another. We're striving together for something. We have to have that unified vision. Our focus needs to be on Christ. We're striving together for the faith of the gospel. We're striving together to bring the gospel to souls, so we have to have that unified vision. Many times the word *conversation* simply means "conduct; behavior," but here it means "to behave as a citizen."

What kind of a citizen? Philippians 3:20 says, "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Our *conversation*, meaning "our citizenship." That word is translated, for whatever reason, to mean *our citizenship*. We're citizens of heaven. Do you know what? As we are citizens of heaven, we're not conducting ourselves as is going on in this world. We're not doing the world's ways. We dress like they would in heaven. How do they dress in heaven? I have no idea, but I know it's holy. I know it's righteous. I know that it's not something unseemly. I know that it's pure. I know that it incites purity. So we are citizens of heaven.

Again, Philippians 1:7, "Only let your conversation be [behave as a citizen] as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs ..." What would He (Christ) hear of our affairs? Would He hear that we're standing fast? This works universally, and this works locally. All of the Bible was pretty much written locally, right? It was written to the Philippians, to the Corinthians, and to the Ephesians. It was written to local congregations. We apply it universally, yes, but what do we hear of the affairs that are going on in Hagerstown? in Hattiesburg? in Deville? or wherever? I want

to hear of your affairs, that you are standing fast in one spirit, with one mind. We have our focus. Our focus is on the work of God. *Striving together* means “to seek jointly; wrestling in company with.” So we’re fighting together for the faith of the gospel.

OUR BEHAVIOR IS IMPORTANT

Now, we know that if we’re to have a conversation that becometh the gospel of Christ, then what is that? Let us look at I Timothy 4:12: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers [the gospel of Christ], in word [in what you have to say], in conversation [in your behavior], in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.” Verse 16: “Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine [because the teachings are important; sound doctrine. Jesus said, ‘Man shall know my doctrine.’]; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

We can bring all kinds of people to something, but if we don’t bring them to what’s true, what have we done? We’re not going to save people if we bring them to something false. I’m not implying at all that we’re something false. I’m only trying to emphasize that doctrine is important. Love is important. It’s all important. I’m not trying to lift one above the other. But there are a lot of people who say, “It doesn’t really matter so much what we believe. We don’t all believe this.” Well, there may be some things that don’t matter. There are some things we can believe differently that the Jews and the Gentiles did in the first century. They were still following a lot of things in their minds concerning the law and concerning rituals, but it came to the fine line when they tried to put it on everybody else. If you have to follow your conscience on that, well, okay, but that’s not the gospel. That’s just you having a difficult time letting go of something or making the transformation. But those things of the gospel that matter, we have to hold to.

Let us read a little bit more about this conversation (conduct) in Ephesians. Some of these things we have to learn. That’s why it’s important to have a true ministry. I needed a true ministry. I needed to be taught some things because I really didn’t know anything when I got saved. I was empty. I wasn’t raised in it. Ephesians 4:17: “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind.” Why are we different? Why do we dress and talk differently? Why do we not do some things? Why do we do some other things? Because it actually matters. People can say that all of those things don’t matter. They matter! I’m not dealing in specifics. I’m just saying that it matters what we do. Holiness matters. That’s what we need to concentrate on. Am I holy? Does God accept this? Is God pleased with what I wear? Is He pleased with the words that come out of my mouth? Is He pleased with where I go? Is He pleased with what I do? Verses 18-20: “Having the understanding darkened [The Gentiles had their understanding darkened.], being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance [They didn’t know.] that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness [unbridled lusts], to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ.” You haven’t learned Him. Teaching is important.

We’ll read Ephesians 4:11, 12: “And he [the Lord] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry [to perfect the saints to do the work of the ministry, which is the sharing and the spreading of the gospel. The whole body is the ministering body. We’re ministering to one another.], for the edifying of the body of Christ.”

CHRIST WILL TEACH US SOME THINGS

Christ will teach us some things. Ephesians 4:21, 22: “If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” We know we don’t do corrupt things anymore. We have put off that old man. I knew I couldn’t drink and smoke anymore. I knew I couldn’t curse anymore. God delivered me from all of those. Verse 23: “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind.” We have to have a solid, true experience if we’re going to live this life. We have to have a transformation.

Many people out in denominationalism never get the transformation. They never get truly reconciled back to God. They get religious. They may get baptized, but they never get their hearts transformed. They can shake the preacher’s hand and go to church. I’m not speaking of everyone out there, but much of it is, they can do all these things. If they don’t get their hearts changed, they’ll never go forward in anything but religion. We have to be renewed. When I got saved, I didn’t think the same way anymore. I was renewed in my mind. I wanted to serve God. I didn’t want to do evil. If you find someone like that, holiness will appeal to them. Even out in the religious world, if you find someone who has really gotten saved, regardless if they’ve been told that we are all sinners and always will be, they won’t want to continue a life of sin.

Ephesians 4:24-26: “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” Don’t hold a grudge. Don’t keep evil in your mind against someone. Don’t let your anger go over into sin. Don’t let the sun go down on your anger. Deal with it. Don’t carry it over into tomorrow. Get before God. “Oh, God, you know these feelings, these emotions.” We all have emotions, Saints of God. We are emotional creatures. Just like we feel love, we feel anger. The question is: What are we going to do with it? Don’t let it carry over. Verse 27: “Neither give place to the devil.” If you carry it over and let it build, you will be giving place to the devil.

Ephesians 4:28-30: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.” The Spirit of God has His seal upon us. He has His signet upon us. That

signet, that stamp is holiness. It is the Spirit of God living His life through us.

Ephesians 4:31, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice." Why? Because we're new creatures. We're serving Christ now. Verse 32: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." Saints of God, be kind one to another. Be tenderhearted and forgiving, because we're going to face some things, and because we're only human and have feelings, and we're different. We're either from the city or the country, and we've been raised up in our homes by people who didn't treat us well, and some who did treat us well. We experienced all kinds of things in life that formed us and made us who we are. If we were brought together in one room in our former state, in the way we were, there would be trouble, but God took care of all of that. He cleaned us up. He gave us a new heart. He gave us a mind to learn and to receive the Word of God. He gave us a heart to want to love one another. We still have to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace because we are different. Saints of God, let us forgive one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. That's learning Christ. We are to be a holy people. That's part of our conversation, part of our lifestyle and conduct.

I John 2:15-17: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. [What's our standard? That's our standard.] And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." We must be holy. We must live holy. It says in I Timothy 4 that you must take heed unto yourself. I believe one part of *take heed* means to "keep an eye on." Keep an eye on yourself and on the doctrine. Let us make sure we're lined up with the doctrine. That's what matters. The words that God spoke are what we're going to be judged on.

JOINED TOGETHER IN LOVE

We need to be perfectly joined in love. Let's go to Ephesians 4:1: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." Walk worthy of this calling. God called us. He called us to salvation. He actually took time out of His day to come and deal with us.

God came to me in an old room. I lived in a house with some other musician guys. I had a mattress on the floor in a room. There was no dresser. No mirror on the wall. My clothes were in a long-neck beer box. Everything I owned was in there. No light bulb in that room. It was just a place to crash at night. Do you know what? The Holy Spirit came in that room and talked to my soul. He wasn't ashamed to come in there with me, but He came after me. He gave me a call and started talking to my heart in words and thoughts that I didn't use. But I understood what He was saying. What He told me was, Jesus is against everything this world has going on. That affected me. I lay there on that old mattress in that dark room, and I cried. I got up the next morning and went on in my sinful life, but it was a

matter of months before the Lord saved me. Thank God, He called us.

Walk worthy of your calling, as Ephesians 4:2 says, "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love." We're all saved. Why do we have to endeavor to walk worthy? Because of the devil. He wants to destroy our love and our unity. He wants to destroy our effectiveness at reaching souls in the world. It doesn't matter to him that this gospel or this truth will never perish from the earth. He doesn't care what the Word of God says. He's going to work just as hard as he can anyway. If you knew you were going to be defeated, it would affect your zeal a little bit, right? I mean if you knew "I'm doing this for nothing" it would affect your zeal. It doesn't affect the devil's zeal. He's out for whatever he can get. Listen, Saints, with all lowliness and meekness, we need to be longsuffering (not being short with one another). Do you know what *forbearing* means? "Putting up with one another." Can we put up with one another? Back to what we were talking about earlier. Can we forbear with one another? How are we going to do it? In love. We're going to have to put up with one another through love. Ephesians 4:3, "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Ephesians 4:4, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling." What is the "one hope of your calling"? Eternal life. That is our hope. That's the big payoff, Brethren. We're all just trying to get to heaven. We're all just doing the best we can do with the tools we have to get to heaven. That is our hope. There's only one. Our hope is all the same. We all want to get to heaven. I want to help you get there. You want to help me get there. You want to help yourself get there. Just as sure as there is only one hope, there is only one body. There is only one church. There is only one Holy Spirit that's in that church.

There is only one Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. There is only one faith, the faith of the gospel. There is one baptism. I see this as (and you're free to see it as you want to) one baptism, because there's a baptism of the Holy Ghost and water baptism. Jesus said, "I have a baptism that I am baptized with." To me, that one baptism is water baptism in this sense: It shows the same thing all the time. Water baptism shows the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's a common thing. Everybody who gets baptized is showing the same thing: the death and resurrection of Christ, and their death and resurrection with Him. That's the way I look at it. Ephesians 4:6, "One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all."

We have to endure. We have to put up with one another. All of us have to put up with one another as ministers. We don't all think alike. We don't all know alike. What we know alike, we know alike, and we need to hold to that. Like I said, when I got saved, I didn't know anything. There were a lot of things that took me time. People had to endeavor with me because I didn't know. But I had a spirit that I wanted to live for God. We need to endeavor with those things.

OFFENSES WILL COME

Now, we're going to have personal offenses. Well, we are. We're going to offend somebody. James said,

"In many things we offend all." Or, "In many things, we all offend," I believe that is what he's saying there. "If any man offend not in word," meaning, to my mind, the teaching of the Word. But still, we're going to have offenses. We're going to get offended by something sometimes. What are we going to do about it? It happens. Sometimes it's through a misunderstanding. Someone says something, and we thought he said something else. We might be fighting melancholy or something might be trying to depress us at the time. We're different on different days sometimes. A person can say the same thing to you on two different days and it will affect you differently. He means it in lightheartedness, and you take it in lightheartedness, and then two weeks go around and he says something similar in lightheartedness, but you don't take it that way because of the way you feel. Not because he's changed, but because you feel different.

Let us look at I Corinthians 4:11-13: "Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it [forbear]: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." I saw this as I was looking at these thoughts. I thought about "we offend." But we must keep the unity in all of these things. We offend one another as saints sometimes. I'm not saying you mean to. I'm saying we do things that maybe offends someone's feelings or whatever. It's happened to you and to me. It happens to all of us at times. It's common. Sometimes we think we have to go straighten it out. "Someone offended me, so what should I do? I don't want to carry this around, so I'll just go to him and tell him." Why? My thought is, I was reading this about Paul, and he said, "Being persecuted, what do I do? I suffer it. I forbear it."

WE ARE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

What are we supposed to do to our enemies? Love them and pray for them. So why can't we do that with those who we know love us? Why do we need to bring the offense up? I'm not saying don't go to someone if you have to go to someone about something. All I'm saying is, Paul said, "I'm persecuted, mistreated, but I'll forbear it." Love those who persecute you. Be good to them. If we're persecuted by others, we're supposed to forgive them and love them. We don't even have to tell them that we forgive them, but just forgive them. We should be able to do that to the saints.

Colossians 3:12, 13: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies [a heart of mercy], kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing [putting up with] one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." Just forgive them, for we would think we have the grace and the love in our hearts to be able to do that. Here again, you have to apply this to your heart as the situation goes. Sometimes someone may need to be advised of something. I'm just talking about every time something happens, it's not a Matthew 18 moment, where we go and confront them with it. Just forgive. Jesus

didn't make a big spectacle out of it. He just forgave me. He didn't bring it up.

Colossians 3:14, "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." That word *bond* there doesn't mean like glue. It actually means "a joint, a tie, or a ligament." It ties us together. It's a uniting principle. Charity (love) is that which ties us together. Verses 15-17: "And let the peace of God rule [let it reign] in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body [We're in this together and to be a help one to another.]; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." If we would consider these things more deeply, we might not cause an offense. I'm looking at it from the side of being offended and how to deal with it. I think if we're more thoughtful in ourselves, maybe we would never cause it to begin with. Offenses are going to come. This doesn't solve everything. May God help us to think on this. When people are persecuting you, you suffer it. You don't strike back at them. You don't try to get even. You don't try to show them up or something. You try to show Christ and forgive.

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." That's powerful, isn't it? "They don't know. They're ignorant. Forgive them." Stephen said, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." They were stoning him. It didn't feel good. All was coming against his mind in that. He said, in effect, "This is nothing. I signed up for whatever you, Lord, want to use me for. I signed up to be offended."

Our love must be deeper than feelings. It has to be deeper than emotions. I like emotional love: the love I feel towards my brethren, the emotional love I feel towards my wife and family, or to whomever it might be. That's that warm and fuzzy love. But our love has to be deeper than warm and fuzzy. Our love has got to work when we don't feel it. Love has to be a principle by which we live. Love is there and it directs me. It's a stop sign sometimes. It's a slow down sign sometimes; not because I feel it, but because I know that is what I live by. It's a law by which we live. Don't think of love as just emotion. We manifest love, not necessarily because we feel it, but because love directs us to conduct ourselves in certain ways.

Ephesians 4:31, 32. We read this already, but we want to read it again: "Let all bitterness [meaning, a bitter root producing a bitter fruit], and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." James said, "Swift to hear, slow to speak." We have to somewhat train ourselves or meditate upon this so we'll manifest these things when we need to, because the enemy is going to come. When something that happens offends, here comes emotion. Here comes heat. Yes, it's at the forefront. So what do we have to do? Stop! love says this.

John 17:19, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth."

Jesus set Himself apart. He consecrated Himself to the cross so that we could benefit from it. "I sanctify myself that they can be sanctified through the truth." Verses 20-22: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one." What binds us together is the Holy Spirit. "The glory that the Father gave me, that glory of being the only begotten Son of God," through which we become sons of God. We share in His Spirit. We're filled with His Spirit. Even as the Spirit lit upon Jesus like a dove that day, the Holy Spirit came and dwelt in our hearts. The glory of it. Why? So we could be one. Verse 23: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one [perfectly joined together]; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

CONCLUSION

Saints of God, don't allow anything to come between us. How much strife can we allow in our hearts to come between us? Zero. It's a work of the flesh. No strife. Amos 3:3 says, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" No. My understanding of that is, can two start off on a journey except they agree on a place to meet? That just how I see it. We have to agree. We have to meet doctrinally. We have to have a right spirit as well, because there are people who have doctrine but may not have a good spirit. Mark 3:24, 25: "If a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand." We need to be perfectly joined together.

Thank you, Saints of God. I appreciated your attention. †

THE SPIRIT OF THANKSGIVING

Compiled from the Bible Illustrator

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."—1 Thessalonians 5:18.

In every tragedy you can look at what you've lost and be hateful, or you can look at what you have left and be grateful. Joseph (Old Testament) was a grand example of choosing to be grateful instead of hateful in the face of betrayal.—Gerald Mann

Alexander Whyte, the Scottish preacher, always began his prayers with an expression of gratitude. One cold, miserable day his people wondered what he would say. He prayed, "We thank Thee, O Lord, that it is not always like this."

If one should give me a dish of sand, and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet, and sweep through it, and it would draw to itself the most invisible particles. The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find some heavenly blessings.

—Henry Ward Beecher

Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, after being robbed, wrote this in his diary:

Let me be thankful ...

* first, because I was never robbed before.

* second, because although they took my wallet, they did not take my life.

* third, because although they took my all, it was not much.

* fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.

Recognize Your Blessings

"Count your blessings!" That is excellent counsel, but sometimes we have to recognize them first!

A man who owned a small estate wished to sell it. Sending for a real estate agent, he asked him to write an advertisement describing the house and land.

When the ad was ready, the agent took it to the owner and read it to him. "Read that again," said the owner.

The agent read the description of the estate once more. "I don't think I will sell after all," said the owner. "I have been looking for an estate agent like that all my life, and I did not know that I owned it!"

Count your blessings—yes, but start by asking God to open your eyes to see your possessions in Christ. Begin by recognizing all that you have in Christ. That will change your entire perspective and enable you to praise God for what you have.

We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven. We have been preserved, the many years, in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth, and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own.

Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to God that made us! It behooves us, then to humble ourselves before the offended Power, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.

—April 30, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln's Proclamation for a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer

The Greatest Saint

"Would you know who is the greatest saint in the world? It is not he who prays most or fasts most; it is not he who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice, but it is he who is always thankful to God, who wills everything that God willeth, who received everything as an instance of God's goodness, and has a heart always ready to praise God for it." —William Law

Church of God (Universal), Inc.
The Way of Truth
P. O. Box 88
Hagerstown, MD 21741-0088 U.S.A.

Non-Profit Organization
U. S. POSTAGE PAID
Mercersburg, PA
Permit No. 15

THE CHURCH OF GOD STANDS FOR

An eternal God	Psalm 90:2
A divine Christ	John 1:1, 14
An infallibly inspired Bible	II Timothy 3:16
Salvation from sin	Matthew 1:21
The new birth	John 3:1-7
Entire Sanctification	Ephesians 5:25, 26
A holy life	Titus 2:11, 12
	Hebrews 12:10-14
Unity of God's people	John 17:21
	I Corinthians 12:13
Divine Healing	James 5:14, 15
The ordinances	Matthew 28:19, 20
Eternal life	Matthew 25:46
	John 3:15; 6:54; 10:28
Eternal punishment	Mark 9:43-46
	Revelation 20:15

YOU SHOULD KNOW MORE ABOUT THE CHURCH OF GOD

Jesus bought it with His own blood	Acts 20:28
It has a good foundation	Ephesians 2:20
	I Corinthians 3:11
Christ is the Head	Ephesians 1:22; 5:23
	Isaiah 9:6
Christ is the Door	John 10:9
	John 10:1
	Acts 2:47
Only the saved are members	John 15:2-6
	I John 3:8, 9
Membership is offered to all	II Peter 3:9
	Revelation 22:17
Membership is rewarded	John 14:2, 3

COMING MEETINGS

2023 ESCONDIDO Camp Meeting
Escondido, California
November 8-12, 2023, Lord willing
Bro. John Romero, Host Pastor

2023 PHILIPPINE CONVENTION
Paniqui, Tarlac
December 26-30, 2023, Lord willing
Bro. Rey Fabian, Host Pastor

2024 JAMAICA CONVENTION
Catadupa, St. James
February 13-18, 2024, Lord willing
Bro. Hezekiah Lamey, Host Pastor

2024 HONDURAS CONVENTION
Coxen Hole, Roatan
April 2-7, 2024, Lord willing
Sis. Ethlyn Soto, Host Pastor