

The Way of Truth

Vol. 82

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

No. 1

ARE YOU BAD GROUND?

SEE PAGE 6

Beginning our
82nd year
proclaiming the
gospel of Christ

JANUARY 2024

GOD'S WILL FOR THE NEW YEAR

"For the land, whither thou goest in to possess it, is not as the land of Egypt, from whence ye came out, where thou sowedst thy seed, and wateredst it with thy foot, as a garden of herbs: But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: A land which the Lord thy God careth for: the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year."—Deuteronomy 11:10-12.



AS WE BEGIN a new calendar year, I would like for us to consider what the will of God is and what He wants us to do in 2024. Charles Naylor penned in one of his songs, "The future lies unseen ahead, It holds I know not what." The world is in a deplorable condition. With wars in Ukraine and in Gaza, it appears as though hatred has won out. In our great land of America, the landscape is disheartening with mass killings happening regularly and moral corruption revealed throughout. But God's people need never despair! As our text says, "God's eyes are always upon His land [His people]." 2023 is gone forever, and 2024 is in our grasp. God has brought us safely to this present hour. Without a doubt, He won't forsake us in the coming year.

So what does God want in this coming year? What is God's will? Without including the Lord in the picture, things look bleak. But there is a God in heaven! The Bible tells us plainly what God wills for 2024.

1. *God wills that all be saved in 2024.* "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."—II Peter 3:9.

2. *God wants His church to have a greater soul burden in the coming year.* "Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children."—Isaiah 66:8.

3. *He wills all men to come to the knowledge of the truth.* "God will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."—I Timothy 2:4. God wills all to come to a knowledge of the truth.

4. *God wills that each believer be sanctified in the coming year.* "For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication."—I Thessalonians 4:3. God wills all to abstain from fornication. And in chapter 5, verse 23 of the same book we read: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

5. *God wants us to draw closer to Him in 2024.* "But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all thy works."—Psalm 73:28. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you."—James 4:8.

6. *He desires to answer our prayers in 2024.* "And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."—Romans 8:27.

7. *He wants to deliver men from this present evil world in 2024.* "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father."—Galatians 1:4.

8. *In the coming year, God wants us to do His will from the heart, not to please men.* "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."—Ephesians 6:6.

9. *He wants us to be thankful in 2024.* "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."—I Thessalonians 5:18.

10. *In 2024, God desires that we overcome in every trial.* "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."—I Peter 4:12-16.

Trials come in many forms.

God desires that each of us to press the battle on throughout the new year. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—Philippians 3:13, 14.

He wants us to press through discouragement and depression. "O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life."—Psalm 42:6-8.

And to press through dry spells. Even Jesus felt at times that God was nowhere around as when He cried out, "Father, why have you forsaken me?"

Don't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,

When the road you're trudging seems all uphill,

When the funds are low, and the debts are high,

And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,

When care is pressing you down a bit—

Rest, if you must, but don't you quit.

ABOUT THE COVER

Mount Temple is a mountain in Banff National Park of the Canadian Rockies of Alberta, Canada. Mt. Temple is located in the Bow River Valley between Paradise Creek and Moraine Creek and is the highest peak in the Lake Louise area.

THE WAY OF TRUTH

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—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

Life is queer with its twists and turns,
As every one of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won had he stuck it out;
Don't give up though the pace seems slow—
You may succeed with another blow.

Often the goal is nearer than,
It seems to a faint and faltering man,
Often the struggler has given up,
When he might have captured the victor's cup,
And he learned too late when the night slipped down
How close he was to the golden crown.

Success is failure turned inside out—
The silver tints of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems afar;
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit—
It's when things seem worst that you mustn't quit.
—Selected

The Lord wills that every child of God fight the good fight of faith and not quit in his journey with the Master. He doesn't expect you and me to make it on our own in 2024. He promises to be with us. "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall

renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."—Isaiah 40:28-31.

In addition, the hosts of heaven will be available to us all year long.

When the man of God was threatened by the Syrian army, his servant was beside himself with fear. We read in II Kings 6:15-17, "And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." Though the world is against the saint of God, there is still more with us than be with them!

Finally, the saints are behind each other—"And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it."—I Corinthians 12:26.

So as the new year dawns, let us be assured that God is still on His throne, and His will is for 2024 to be a victorious year, one of victory in the camp of the saints, that true unity will prevail, and each Christian will be found walking in the light of the gospel. †

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

We trust that 2024 will be special.

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THE POETRY PAGE

"In this new year, be grateful that God has given you victory over many things over the past year."—Steven M. Hitchcock.

A NEW LEAF Anonymous

He came to my desk with a quivering lip—
The lesson was done—
"Dear Teacher, I want a new leaf," he said;
"I have spoiled this one."
In place of the leaf so stained and blotted,
I gave him a new one all unspotted;
And into his sad eyes smiled—
"Do better now, my child."

I went to the throne with a quivering soul—
The old year was done—
"Dear Father, hast thou a new leaf for me?
I have spoiled this one."
He took the old leaf, stained and blotted,
And gave me a new one all unspotted,
And into my sad heart smiled—
"Do better now, my child."

A YEAR UNTRIED R. M. Offord

A year untried before me lies;
What shall it bring of strange surprise?
Or joy, or grief, I cannot tell;
But God, my Father, knoweth well.
I make it no concern of mine,
But leave it all with Love Divine.

Be sickness mine, or rugged health;
Come penury to me, or wealth;
Though lonesome I must pass along,
Or loving friends my way may throng,—
Upon my Father's Word I rest;
Whatever shall be shall be best.

No ill can come but He can cure;
His Word doth all of good insure;
He'll see me through the journey's length,
For daily need give daily strength.
'Tis thus I fortify my heart,
And thus do fear and dread depart.

The sun may shed no light by day,
Nor stars at night illumine my way;
My soul shall still know no affright,
Since God is all my life and light.
Though all the earthly lamps grow dim,
He walks in light who walks with Him.

O year untried!—thou hast for me
Naught but my Father's eye can see;
Nor canst thou bring me loss or gain,
Or health or sickness, ease or pain,
But welcome messenger shall prove
From Him whose name to me is Love.

GOD HOLDS THE KEY Anonymous

God holds the key of all unknown,
And I am glad;
If other hands should hold the key,
Or if He trusted it to me,
I might be sad.

What if tomorrow's cares were here
Without His rest?
I'd rather He'd unlock the day,
And as the hours swing hear Him say,
"My will is best."

The very dimness of my sight
Makes me secure;
For, groping in my misty way,
I feel His hand and hear Him say,
"My help is sure."

I cannot read His future plans,
But this I know;
I have the smiling of His face
And all the refuge of His grace,
While here below.

Enough; this covers all my want!
And so I rest;
For what I cannot He can see,
And in His care I'll surely be
Forever blest. †



Dear Young People,

The idea of boundaries isn't something we naturally like to accept. It is through instruction, experience, and wisdom that we are able to see the safety, blessing, and benefits that proper boundaries provide. They protect us even when we aren't always watching,

understanding, or seeing the potential dangers. Accepting and embracing God's boundaries offer the most fulfilling life possible! We trust these thoughts on boundaries will be a blessing to you.

—Bro. Doug

BOUNDARIES

By Bro. Alan Richards

PROVERBS 22:28 says, "Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set." What is a *landmark*? Today, it is commonly perceived as "an object or feature of a landscape or town that is easily seen and recognized from a distance, especially one that enables someone to establish their location." But I believe a definition that more accurately applies to what the Bible describes here is "the boundary of an area of land, or an object marking this."



What then, is a *boundary*? The dictionary defines it as "a line that marks the limit of an area; a dividing line," or, "a limit of a subject or sphere of activity."

As Christians, we have boundaries. These boundaries are set by God through His Word. This verse from Proverbs may be referencing the commands in Deuteronomy ("Thou shalt not move thy neighbor's landmark ..." etc.), but it can also be applied to our spiritual lives, and when relating to us on a personal level, it is instructing us to not alter the boundaries defined by the Bible. While some guidelines are clear and easily understood, there are some boundaries that the Bible does not precisely outline. Especially in our modern world, there are many things which we must define for ourselves using the principles taught in the Bible. Seeking to understand and follow the heart of God, whether the boundaries are clear or fuzzy, offers its reward.

Here is an example of what can happen when we seek to know our plain, God-set boundaries and to clearly define the vague ones. After the death of Moses, God is instructing Joshua as to how he can be a godly leader. Joshua 1:7, 8: "Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper withersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou

mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." God instructed Joshua to meditate in the law of God, to study it, and if he observed all that it said, he would be a successful Christian.

Joshua 24:31 explains the result of Joshua's decision: "And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua, and which had known all the works of the Lord, that he had done for Israel." Joshua's decision to serve the Lord and seek to understand all His law, led to Joshua's generation becoming a godly generation which served the Lord. However, this generation had children and they also had to make a choice; they must either follow their parents' example and seek to understand and follow God's law, or they must turn their backs on their Creator. Judges 2:8-12: "And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnathheres, in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. And also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger."

This is a terrible thing! This generation of Israelites were raised under a God-fearing generation, yet the first thing the Bible says about them is not their hunger for the things of God, but how they provoked the Lord to anger! This is a serious matter! The young people of the children of Israel had godly parents, Christian influences, and diligent leaders around them as they grew up. Yet the pull of worldly nations around them was too much. If they would have sought God, their parents, and their leaders for wisdom on how to serve God in every area, and avoid even the appearance of worldliness, they could have overcome the subtle invasion of ungodly principles into their lives. The reason that this is so important is because we today are much the same. Many of us have Christian parents and godly leaders that we have been raised around.

Although we are part of the church today, we are also the church of tomorrow. That is a HUGE responsibility! One day we will be the ones who must uphold the standard of God. Right now we have our elders to back us up, but some day we must stand alone and stand **STRONG!** The Bible asks, "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" As the future generation of emissaries for Christ, we must be sure that what we believe, teach, and do, matches **COMPLETELY** with what the Bible teaches. If we do not, Satan can slip in a little error, a little worldly theme, and soon we cannot be told apart from the rest of humanity who do not acknowledge God. The book, *What the Bible Teaches* by F. G. Smith, has a section in which he talks about one of the tactics Satan uses on Christians, especially young people—Worldliness.

We commonly think of worldliness as immodest dress, foul language, and vulgar entertainment. While this is worldliness, there are some things that the world does that do not line up with God's principles and which are much more subtle. These things can slowly slip into our lives without us ever realizing it. They pose a real threat to our message of Christianity. It pollutes our message and waters down the power of the gospel. The only way to identify details that are polluting our lives is to read the Word of God earnestly, examine our lives carefully, excluding nothing, and sincerely asking our heavenly Father, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

God's boundaries are, especially in our modern world, fuzzy at times. But a close relationship with God will keep us from actions which He would not approve of. Proverbs 4:26, 27: "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left: remove thy foot from evil."

May we ponder the path of our feet with the eye of others and see if what we are doing, at all times, matches the Bible. May we not step outside of God's boundaries for our lives. And if God reveals to us that we are on the wrong side of a gray boundary, may we be quick to withdraw our foot from evil. I pray that this generation of Christian young people can be held out to the world as a perfect example of what Christianity looks and lives like. May God bless and keep you! †

STEPS HEAVENWARD

By the late R. L. Berry

Chapter VIII

The Family of Feelings



CHAPTER on this subject, the Family of Feelings, could and would be amusing if the trouble some young converts have with them was not so dreadfully real. Many of us know by experience how really painful feelings can become. There is Mr. Feeling, his wife Mrs. Miserable Feeling, their children, Depressing Feeling, Accused Feeling, Envious Feeling, Impatient Feeling, Imitation Carnal Feeling, Oppressed Feeling, Discouraged Feeling, Hopeless Feeling, Despaired Feeling, Forsaken Feeling, Hypocritical Feeling, and maybe some others whose names I have forgotten; for I used to be very well acquainted with the whole family, but since I moved out of the Vale of Doubts up on the Mountains of Hope and Faith, I very rarely meet with any of them.

The whole trouble with feelings is caused by supposing that salvation is a matter of feelings. When this is done feelings become the standard. No greater mistake could be made by the young convert. This mistake has caused as much or more sorrow, pain, discouragement, and backsliding than any other thing that Christians have to meet.

Generally speaking, the trouble with feelings begins about the time that the first good and joyful feelings that attended our conversion begin to subside, or when they disappear entirely. Then doubts begin to come. Attention is called to our state of feeling, which admittedly at times is very unsatisfactory. Sometimes the whole transaction of having been converted seems so unreal that it makes one feel as though he were a hypocrite to say it was real or that there was or is anything to our experience.

We might say allegorically, that just at this stage the Feeling Family are very busy, Mrs. Miserable Feeling takes quite a hand in talking to our souls. Then the whole family come in, Depressed, Accused, Hypocritical, Hopeless, and all. If one tries to pray, these feelings keep up such a din one cannot make any progress; if a little faith does come in, the feelings seem to be determined to hold the fort. Under these terribly painful feelings some young Christians have felt as though God had utterly cast them off, that they were lost, hopelessly lost; that if God did forgive, they had doubted till they had lost it all, and despair settled down until the mental faculties were almost unable to bear the strain these agitations brought upon them. Under the power of these bad feelings all seems perfectly black, and the future is full of dark forebodings. All such souls have our profoundest sympathy, because from experience we know how dreadful the condition is.

But there is a way out, and that way is FAITH. At the very outset learn this one grand truth—that salvation is by faith, not by feelings. We are commanded to "believe" on the Lord Jesus Christ; not "feel" on Him. We overcome the world by "faith"; not by feelings. Christ will stay in our hearts "by faith"; not by feelings. Thus it is all the way through the Bible, always it is "faith," "have faith," "believe," "believe in God." "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). "Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be established" (II Chronicles 20:20). "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:17). "We walk by faith, not by sight" (II Corinthians 5:7). "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4).

Faith is simply believing. You have asked God for something He has said He would give, you have met the conditions upon which the promise was made, and faith rests upon God's Word that He has done, or is doing, or will do in His own good time, what we have asked Him to do. That is faith.

The difficulty with feelings is that they are taken as indicating our real state, whereas in reality our feelings may be wholly deceptive. After a person repents and believes unto salvation, when the first joys of it subside or cease then often bad feelings take their place. These bad feelings are taken as an indication that we are really bad ourselves. We feel bad and consequently we are bad, is the logic of feelings. But really we may be as good, as near God, as holy, when our feelings of joy cease as when they were flowing full and strong. On arising in the morning one may "feel" as

though he were no Christian at all, and if feelings were really indicative of the state of the heart then he should conclude he is not a Christian.

Depending on feelings leads inevitably to discouragement. Feelings go up and down despite all one can do, and he who depends on his feelings is encouraged and has faith when he is feeling good and is discouraged and has doubts when he is feeling bad. Instead of having faith in God, he has faith in his feelings. If he feels good and joyful, he has faith in his feelings, and believes he is all right; if he feels bad, he has faith in his bad feelings, and believes he is partly or wholly wrong. This is the sum and substance of the whole matter. We have put it plainly so that none can fail to understand. We are not commanded to have any faith in our feelings, but to have faith in God.

There was in one congregation where I was pastor a certain brother who had not learned the secret of keeping the victory by faith. At some services a dark, blue look would spread over his countenance, and almost anyone could see that he was discouraged. At other times he would come in with his broad face wreathed in smiles, a bright, joyful look in his eyes, and with a cheery voice he would tell of how precious Jesus was to him. "I am on the mountain-top," he would say. By and by he overcame the discouragements and became known as "Mountain-top Richardson."

When a young convert turns from faith to feelings, the enemy of souls takes advantage of it and makes that soul a dumping-ground for all kinds of ugly feelings. One will feel envious, angry, impatient, petulant, hard, and ill toward man and God, unloving, unsympathetic. In fact, experience proves that there is scarcely any ugly feeling but what Satan can throw it over the poor Christian who has allowed feelings to be his guide. To such an extent can these things go that one may feel unnatural a good portion of his time. When others rejoice, he feels bad, when others weep, he feels no sympathy. And thus a person is doomed to live his life in spiritual misery if he does not cut short the career of bad feelings, by faith.

There is no other way but the way of faith. Struggling, praying, thinking, becoming agitated—nothing is worth anything except faith. Years ago the writer experienced the full misery of all kinds of bad and ugly feelings. It seemed perfectly impossible ever to win. Hours were spent daily wrestling in agony with doubts and bad feelings and all kinds of evil suggestions. He was shown most clearly by the direct voice of God in his soul that faith, simple faith, was the only remedy. And he was compelled under divine influence to renounce feelings of every sort and to consecrate to pay no attention to any of them, not to care even if he did feel bad, and to trust God wholly, absolutely, and without a waver. Right out of the midst of discouragement, of doubt, he cast himself on God absolutely. That was a good many years ago; but it has never been forgotten. After that when he was filled with bad feelings and when doubts surged through and through his soul, he calmly declared he was God's child, and he did not care how he felt. Of course this sounded much like a lie, for his feelings did care; but once having resolved to pay no more attention to his feelings, and counting on God

to preserve him, he held fast and was soon rewarded by feeling better. Despite all the inner clamor of the old doubts and feelings for a discussion, he pushed them all aside, declaring he was God's child and that God was keeping him just as he wanted to. To the suggestion that he would be deceived if he did not pray, he declared he would not pray a moment about it, that he was all right. To the suggestion to investigate the feeling, he declared there was nothing to investigate, that he was saved. To the suggestion that he felt very bad, he declared that the way he felt was God's business, that if he felt bad evidently God allowed or wanted him to have such feelings for some good and beneficent purpose, unseen at the present time, but which would be revealed at the right moment. Such a course brought him out more than a conqueror over all bad feelings.

Do thou likewise, young convert, if you have allowed feelings to be your guide. If you have not met this temptation yet, take a lesson from the lives of other Christians and do not go by feelings, but by faith. Feelings will vary all through life; but faith will hold us steady, like the ship's anchor, safe through every storm. Between the life of faith and the life of feeling, you will have to choose every day. Doubly happy will you be, young convert, if you have once for all made the wise choice, and every morning renew that choice, not to seek or listen for good feelings, but to walk by faith, according to God's Word.

He who seeks for good feelings in the Christian way will not find them; but he who cares not how he feels but believes in God will have all the good feelings he will need. Good feelings are a result, not something to be sought for directly. Faith in God unto salvation causes one to feel more or less good, but doubts will bring in many a bad feeling. There is something a little selfish about wanting good feelings. Babies are given "sugar-teats" to keep them quiet, but the Lord desires that we serve Him, not for good feelings, but from principle and love.

Take these simple rules as guides in your daily life:

1. As our faith is in the Word, so God will be to us; therefore live by faith, not by sight.
2. When there is no feeling that you are saved, believe that Jesus saves you anyway.
3. When there is no feeling that Christ is in you, trust His Word that He will dwell in your heart by faith.
4. When there is no assurance of feeling, look wholly to the assurance of faith.
5. When you feel cold and dead, live by faith in a risen Lord.
6. When you feel that Jesus is far off, believe He is nigh, even in thine heart.
7. When there is no feeling of liveliness in prayer, trust in God.
8. When you have no feeling of interest in the Bible, read by faith, trusting God to work mightily in you.
9. When you feel no joy, believe in Jesus.
10. When there is no feeling of gladness, believe in the great rejoicing there is in Christ for you.

Faith is the victory, the blessedness, the joy. Christ will fulfil His Word. †

ARE YOU BAD GROUND?

2023 Hagerstown Convention Message by Bro. Doug Shenberger

I WOULD LIKE to draw your attention for a few minutes to the book of Matthew, chapter 13, starting with verse 3: “And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”

Now, most of us, if we're honest with ourselves, we find ourselves somewhere in those verses, and we can see some tendencies that we may have for a certain area. A lot of times we like to think about verse 8: “Some fell on good ground.” I think most of us want to be good ground on one level or another, and we like to think about that multiplication there—“brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.” That was all good ground.

WHAT KIND OF GROUND ARE YOU?

I've entitled my thoughts tonight, “Are You Bad Ground?” because a lot of the verses in the passage I just read talked about bad ground, not the good ground. In the beginning thoughts of this passage, I don't think that we should look at these words of Jesus as being some kind of a permanent pronouncement on people. I see it as a snapshot of time. At some particular time as the Word of God goes forth, these are the opposite. These are possibilities, but I don't want us to think that that's the only option or the only time.

As you know, after Jesus gave these words, His disciples came and said, “Why are you speaking in parables? We don't really understand. They don't understand.” Jesus responded to them. I'm not going to go into that, but I'd like to look for a little bit at the explanation that Jesus gave of what the meaning of this parable was in verses 18-23 of Matthew 13. Jesus explained to His disciples what He was talking about in more detail. He said, “Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended. He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful. But he that received seed into the good

ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”

Some people hear the Word of God, but they are on the wayside where, for whatever reason, their understanding is hardened. They can't hear it. They can't grasp it. It falls there, and it's just lying on top of the ground. It's easy for it to be stolen away from them, and the enemy of the soul would come and steal that away so that they don't have knowledge and understanding about the kingdom of God. So it doesn't help them. They're left with no benefit from having heard the Word of God. That is such a sad thing to think about. That's the reality. I want to talk about that in a little more detail as we go on, and for us to just think about that and meditate on that thought. You know, some people are hearing the Word of God and it's not able to get through to them. They're on the wayside, and there is something that's interfering with their ability to understand it and to grasp it. They're unable to see the value of it or to have any benefit from it.

Then we have those who receive that seed, and there's a little good dirt there. There's enough to start that seed. That seed tries to germinate and take root and grow, but it can't really get down very far. There are stones there. There is something there that keeps that plant from really growing well. It can't get very far down. What happens is, something comes along. Tribulation, persecution, the sun comes up, the wind blows, the storms of life come and it doesn't have enough strength. It's not healthy enough and it's not able to stand. In verse 21 it says “by and by he is offended.” It's ineffective, it's not working, it's not possible.

IS YOUR SOIL GROWING THORNS?

Then you have that one who received the seed among the thorns. I believe there's some soil there, too. There was some growth there. But something else sprang up. There was enough depth of soil there, there was enough knowledge that there was a possibility of fruitfulness. But other things came along and they started stealing the nutrients. They grew up higher and they stole the sunlight. They went down deeper and they got the moisture. This little plant was being choked. It didn't have what it needed to survive. It was dying. It was being choked out by the thorns.

As you look at that picture and you think about that, there can be a temptation to look at this in a fatalistic type of way. We have people here tonight who are in a lot of different situations in their lives, a lot of different places. As I said, the title of my thoughts tonight is, “Are You Bad Ground?” You can see some of those descriptions and you can, maybe, identify with them. There might be somebody here tonight that can



identify and they might think, *I'm just bad ground*. That can seem hopeless in a way. That's what I'd like to talk to us a little bit about tonight. That's the burden of my heart. I think a lot about the young people. I'm involved with some of the young people, and I carry a burden for them, so I'm going to talk with you a little bit specifically this evening. I see sometimes some of these things, and I think, *There's somebody there that has a little bit of hopelessness about them. Do they see themselves as bad ground?* They see something that someone else has and they have a desire for that and it looks attractive, but for them it doesn't seem to work that way. There's some bad ground there. I'd like to think about some of the reasons why that is and how that comes about.

When you think about the ground that's by the wayside, that's the ground that's been traveled upon. There's traffic there. It's compacted. It's hard. So if something falls on that, it's just falling on hard surface. It doesn't germinate the seed. There are a lot of people in the world today who are in that situation. They've been beaten down. Some of them just by life and some of them by circumstances that are just outside their control. They've been beaten down by the way they've been treated. Sometimes that can even happen with young people. That's something that really touches your heart, because you may see a young person that's been beaten down by some type of trauma or mistreatment, maybe by parents, maybe by other people in their lives, maybe even by supposed religious leaders. Their faith has been beaten down. Their confidence in God has been beaten down. That's a sad thing. They're by the wayside and they might be looking at what somebody else is experiencing but, for them, there's a hardness there. They hear the Word of God and it doesn't seem real to them. It doesn't seem like it's applicable to them because they're by the wayside. That gospel message goes out and they hear it, but it doesn't seem relevant. They don't understand and it can't help them in their current situation. The Word of God isn't really reaching into their hearts.

IS YOUR HEART STONY GROUND?

Then we have those that have that stony ground. They have the ability to grasp the gospel message. They can sense the beauty of it and they respond to it. It goes out and it touches something in them. They respond and they want that. They want to receive that. They desire all the beautiful things that God has for them. The plant of life starts growing as a response to the knowledge and the understanding they've heard. But there are stones that have been put in there. There are a lot of different types of stones. It can be a little fatalistic if you're dealing with these things. "I have all these problems that other people don't have. I have these things that are keeping me from growing. I've tried to do the right thing, but I don't have the strength to do it. I don't have the depth in me. I can't keep on going like this." There are stones that are blocking the access to the deep nutrients, the moisture that's down deeper, the life, the power that's down deeper. There are stones that are keeping those roots from going down. The person can't bear the temptations or the storms of life, the ridicule, the persecution.

Then we have the thorns. All of these have their own sense of tragedy about them, their own sense of sadness and disappointment. You gain spiritual life and have some knowledge and some determination and some ability to grasp the beauty of Christianity, and you have some roots that are growing down into the good things of God and you're learning of God. You're needing space to grow because you're making progress. But then there are these things that come along—the cares of this world. The cares of this world take so much of our time and attention. We have families and jobs. We have all the ambitions and desires. We have bills to pay and we have places to go. We have dreams and ambitions. We have entertainment. We have so much that would crowd that spiritual life. We have the deceitfulness of riches—the idea that that is where happiness lies, where betterment lies, where the end goal of life is. All of those things can work together and choke. Doesn't anyone know what it's like to choke on something? It's not a good feeling. Choke the Word of God out of you. You can feel it dying almost. It doesn't want to die, but these things are choking the Word of God. There's no time for God.

It can seem fatalistic because you see other people and they're talking about the joys of salvation. They're spending time with the Lord and you can see that they're enjoying serving God. You can see that there's victory in their lives and they're going somewhere. Their plant is looking pretty good; it's bearing fruit. It's replicating. It's having an impact for good on those around. You think, *They have so many better opportunities than I have. Things are easier for them than they are for me. They've been carefully taught and nurtured from the time they were young and I've never had that benefit. It's really not fair.* You know, there's some truth to that. It doesn't seem very fair. Some people do have a little more opportunity than others, a little better start, a little better care. They have a little better chance of having some good ground that's prepared.

IS YOUR HEART GOOD GROUND?

When I think about good ground, I think about ground that's ready. It's been tilled, the stones and thorns have been gotten out. Weeding has been done, maybe a little fertilization. It's not producing, but it's good ground. It has potential. It could be something. God's Spirit wants to prepare the ground, to work with the heart. If you're good ground here tonight, that's not something you should glory in that you're better than somebody else. You should be thankful for that. You should be grateful. You should fall on your knees and thank God for anybody that has helped prepare your ground, because that's a precious and wonderful gift. There's a lot of responsibility that goes along with that.

When I ask the question, "Are you bad ground," and it resonates with you on some level, is there something that can be done? Can you do something about that? At some point, we have to take ownership of our ground. It doesn't matter how we got it. We may have inherited a lot of weaknesses and problems from our parents, our upbringing, our culture, the world around us. But at some point we have to take ownership and say, "It's not good ground, but it's my ground. It's where I am today."

It's what I have to deal with. I may have been unfortunate or my actions caused this, but it's mine to deal with. I'm responsible for it now."

BREAK UP YOUR FALLOW GROUND

Over in the book of Hosea, chapter 10, and verse 12, it says, "Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you." I want to challenge those on the wayside, those that have some hardness of heart, a lack of knowledge, a lack of understanding, and you don't feel like the message of the gospel is resonating with you or that the power of the gospel is really for you, and you hear the words but you're not getting it. You're on the wayside. You don't know how that hardness got there. It might not totally be your fault. It might be a whole lot of other people's fault. Some of it might be your fault, but that's just the situation. You're going to have to take some action if you're going to change that ground. You can't just sit there and say, "Well, that's the ground I was given and there's not much I can do." You have to come to the point where you take ownership of that ground and decide what you're going to do about that ground.

The verse I just read says that you need to break it up. You have to break through that hardness. It's time to seek the Lord. It's going to take some effort. If a farmer has a field and part of it is packed down and things don't grow very well there, and he wants to fix that, he has to do something. He has to go in and break it up. He might bring in a plow. Maybe that's not big enough and he has to do something more. Maybe he needs a chisel plow; he has to get down deeper. There's hardpan that forms there and you can't get through that. If you want to change that, you're going to have to put forth some effort. You're going to have to break up that fallow ground. It's not able to receive seed; it's not able to hear the gospel message. It's not going to help you to sit back, throw up your hands and say, "Well, if the Lord ever wants to do something about that ground, I hope He does it." There's a part for us to play. It's time to seek the Lord. It's time to get some help if you are by the wayside so that you can break up that fallow ground. God will do that work if you ask Him to do it, if you're willing to let Him do it. It might hurt some. It might not feel comfortable. It might not be easy, but it's possible. God will do that work if we seek Him and want that.

What about the stony ground? You know, the stony ground tends to look okay on top. It has a good appearance. You can level it out pretty nicely as long as you get down a little bit under it and smooth some dirt over it. It can look almost like good ground. You can put up a pretty good front sometimes for a while with stony ground. But underneath there are these rocks and you just can't get very far. You can plant a field and there are areas that have stones underneath. Give it a couple of weeks and you can look out across that field and you will see exactly where the stones are because the plants cannot grow. The nutrients and the roots are disconnected from one another. There are nutrients farther down, but the stones are in the way.

Isaiah says, "Gather out the stones" (Isaiah 62:10). We can't expect to have that happen automatically. There are a lot of different kinds of stones: stones of pride, stones of selfishness, stones of laziness. A lot of times you're not going to get rid of those stones except through the work of the Holy Spirit working in your heart and life. The Holy Spirit is going to have to come in there and help you get those stones out. He's not going to do that against your will or as long as you have a fence up around there and say, "That's my ground; I'm going to do what I want with it. I'll work on it the best I can." Some of those things you're not going to get rid of by yourself. You're going to need some help to get those stones out. Eventually that plant, that life is going to die because there's not going to be enough to withstand the realities of life and what's going to come upon you. You might be okay for a while and say, "I'm doing pretty good. This is fun." But something is going to come along that will test you. You're going to have to decide who you really are and what you really stand for. Do you have a root that's holding on to something? Are there nutrients coming up to feed you when you need them the most?

PULLING OUT THE THORNS

In this day and age, the thorny ground is everywhere. Life is so full of activities and entertainments. This world just takes a lot of care. We have relationships. We have reputation. We have to work. We have family and the disciplines of life. We have all these priorities and the promises of material abundance. When we are in the thorns, we're going to need help from the Lord, but there is also some work we have to do. We have to get up and do some of this work if we're going to get the thorns out.

I talked to the young people last night in our fireside chat about consequences. One of the things we talked about was that when you choose an action, you choose the consequence of that action. Whether you want to acknowledge that or not and pretend that's not the case, that's the reality of life. That's the way God made the world. That involves natural law, and it also involves God's law. When you choose to do something, you're going to receive the consequence of that. You can hope you won't. You can pretend you didn't. But in reality, we do.

TAKING ACTION

So if we want to get rid of the thorns, we're going to have to take some action. We're going to have to remove some things. We're going to have to ask God for strength. We're going to have to get out there and start digging. We're going to have to pull. We're going to have to tear. We're going to have to get our hands dirty, maybe a little bit bloody, and put some effort into it if we're going to get rid of the thorns. We're going to have to see them as an existential threat if we're going to get serious about dealing with them. We're going to have to feel like we have a lack of oxygen because we're being choked because we have a lack of God's presence in our lives. It's choking us spiritually. We don't want to get so far gone that we don't even know we're choking. That's what the Scriptures say. These things are going to choke and steal the nutrients, the relationship with God, and choke it out of us.

Even if you feel like you're good ground, how much are you yielding? I think sometimes that if we yield one-fold we're doing pretty good today. Jesus didn't even list that. He started at thirty-fold. That was the like the minimal level. Let's be honest with ourselves. Can we see where we are with our ground? Are you bad ground? If you're in any of these situations, and the Spirit of God shows you that you are bad ground, what are you going to do about it? Are you content with it? "That's the ground I have." Am I content to live with my ground the way that it is? It's a serious question. We can just sit and meditate on that for a while. "I've lived with this ground for so long, and I'm just used to it. I'm pretty comfortable with it. I know it's not very good, but I know exactly what it looks like. I know how it feels. It might not feel great sometimes, but I'm used to it. That's just the way I live." How are the plants looking? Are they even growing at all? Is the seed just lying there just waiting for the devil to take it away and be forgotten? Can you even feel the presence of God talking to you? Can you grasp the beauty of the gospel message? Do you have the knowledge? If you don't, you need to seek the Lord. "I need to get a Bible. I need to start reading God's Word. I need to call upon God, because I've got to break up this fallow ground. I need to do something about it."

Are your plants just little? Are they barely surviving? Are they just barely hanging on? "As long as they get a shower now and then. As long as the sun stays behind that cloud, maybe I'll be okay." Are the leaves drooping? Do they look a little yellow, just not getting the nutrients they need? Are the roots going down to God? Do you really feel connected to the power God has for us?

WHAT ABOUT YOUR LIFE?

What about your life? Do you have spiritual life, but it's just stunted and doesn't have room to grow? You're surviving as long as those weeds and thorns don't get any bigger, but you can't grow. If you look at yourself last year and you look at yourself this year, you can't see much of any change. You can't see where you produced any fruit or got any stronger. The stem is thin. You're trying to reach up to that sunlight, but your stem is thin and weaving through all these other things trying to find some sunlight. It has a root that's trying to go down among a bunch of other roots and find what it needs to satisfy and give life and growth and strength. We need to clear out around us spiritually. Pull those things out. We need some space. I need to be able to grow in the grace of God.

If you have some good ground, maybe you need to get a little extra fertilizer to see if you can bump up the yield. Maybe some irrigation.

I'm concerned. There are some people here tonight that have some bad ground, but they're so used to it, they don't see it. What about me? Do I have some bad ground that I'm not letting the Spirit show me where it is, what it's doing? I need to be able to see that. I don't want to be able to just exist with it and treat it as normal and acceptable, because if I have Christian life, it's going to weaken it. It's not going to give me fulfillment. It's not going to give me the joy it should. It's not going to shed light into the world around me.

There's no beautiful testimony to that. You may have inherited it, but that doesn't mean you need to claim it as your own forever. You might have inherited something that's not great, but now it's yours. That doesn't mean you need to keep it the way it is. What are you going to do with it? Are you going to just accept it as it is and live with it?

If you do that, you're going to give that as an inheritance to somebody else. You're going to give it to your children some day. You're going to give it to your neighbor. You're going to give it to your grandchildren, just giving out more bad ground. The Bible tells us that wickedness is passed down. Fortunately, it's not passed down as long as righteousness is. You might have inherited some bad ground, but you need to see it as it is.

We have to say, "God, we need some equipment here. We need some power here. We need something to deal with this." We have to get out God's plows. We have to get God's excavator out there. We need to say, "I'm going to get out those stones. I'm going to break up that fallow ground. I'm not going to accept that. I'm not going to live like that. I'm not going to give that to my children; I'm going to give them better ground than I had. By the grace of God, by the power of God, I'm going to change."

CONCLUSION

You know, my dad was born into an alcoholic's home. Divorced. His uncles, his family, the whole family were alcoholics. It just wasn't a good environment. By his early teens, he was running wild, drinking. By the time he was fifteen years old, he was a juvenile delinquent. They were just about ready to put him in reform school. I just want you to think about it. If he hadn't changed direction, he would have given me a lot different ground to start with. But the Lord saved him, and he changed his life, and I never knew him the way he was. He had a testimony; he loved God. He made a difference in my life. He made a difference in the lives of his grandchildren.

I just want to challenge you tonight that if you have some bad ground, do something about it. Stand up and do something. God will help you to do it. You don't have to do it all in your own strength. You can't do it all in your own strength. But the Spirit of God will come on the scene and help you to do it.

The Lord bless you. †

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



QUESTION: How literally are we to take the scriptures in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16?

ANSWER: Paul says in Ephesians 5:19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." This verse speaks more from the individual standpoint, and it tells us what our mind and heart needs to dwell on. Those who are spiritually-minded would want to sing or listen to spiritual songs, which edify and lift up the spirit. It is impossible to make "melody in your heart to the Lord" with worldly songs, words that are not fit to be spoken, words that speak of unfaithfulness, lust, and sinful deeds.

In Colossians 3:16, Paul writes, "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." In this verse Paul speaks more generally, that is, it would cover worship services and gatherings.

Saints should sing songs that carry a truthful Bible message in their worship services, not some religious song that has been made popular by some singer that does not carry a real soul edifying message. Some *religious* songs are not fit to be sung or listened to! Note Paul says "teaching and admonishing." You can teach truth through Spirit-filled singing. Saints can be encouraged and souls fed and lifted up by good spiritual singing. Note also, Paul says in this verse, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." One who is hungering and thirsting after God will desire that which feeds the soul.

Having said this, I would also add, I do not think these verses would forbid all types of music that are not directly spiritual. I do not speak of church services now, but other places and other times. Many enjoy the violin when it is played skillfully. I personally used to enjoy Band Marches, although you don't hear much of them anymore. There are other types of music that do not appeal to the baser side of humanity. Of course "rock," or the such like, is out, including much of the country and western style.

Let Colossians 3:17 be your guide: "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."

QUESTION: What additional sign besides the plain Old Testament prophecies they already knew did Jesus give? What was the "sign" of the prophet Jonas?

ANSWER: Jesus told them the time would come when one stone of the temple would not be left upon

another. This was fulfilled when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem.

As to the sign of the prophet Jonas, Jesus gives the answer in Matthew 12:39, 40: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." The people wanted Jesus to give a sign as proof that He was the Messiah, and He told them this was the only sign He would give them, so if Jesus was not resurrected on the third day, He is not the Messiah! Of course, we know He was.

QUESTION: In Genesis 6:2 it speaks of the sons of God taking wives of the daughters of men. My question on this is, Who were the sons of God that it's referring to? Also, Revelation 6:6 says hurt not the oil and the wine. I know the oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit, but what is the wine a symbol of? Is it representing the Word of God? If so, I need some scriptures to back it up. In Revelation 12:14, the woman (church) was given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness. My question on this one is, What are these two wings representing?

ANSWER: In regard to Genesis 6:2, let me quote from Adam Clarke: "As there is a distinction made here between men and those called sons of God, it is generally supposed that the immediate posterity of Cain and that of Seth are intended. The first were mere men, such as fallen nature may produce, degenerate sons of a degenerate father, governed by the desires of the flesh, the desire of the eye and the pride of life. The others were sons of God, not angels, as some have dreamed, but such as were, according to our Lord's doctrine, born again, born from above. The former were apostates from true religion, the latter were those among whom it was preserved and cultivated.

"When men began to multiply on the earth, the chief men took wives of all the handsome poor women they chose. There were tyrants in the earth in those days; and also after the antediluvian days powerful men had unlawful connections with the inferior women, and the children which sprang from this illicit commerce were the renowned heroes of antiquity, of whom the heathens made their gods."

In regard to Revelation 12:14, F. G. Smith says, "As to the meaning of the 'two wings of a great eagle' given the woman to aid her in her flight, I am not able to say positively. ... Perhaps nothing more is intended by the wings than to denote the fact of her successful flight."

QUESTION: Was Paul giving his own commandment in I Corinthians 6:7, and not the commandment of God?

ANSWER: I know of no reason to think other than that Paul was speaking for the Lord. Paul was telling them that as Christians they should not go to the unbelievers, the civil law, to settle the problems that arose among them. As Christians they should be able to settle their problems, and certainly not defraud one another! That would not be Christian. †

THE CHILDREN'S CORNER



ON THE SHELF

A Bible Lesson by Sis. Rebecca Bland

"Excuse me," said one of the brothers in our congregation to my father, "but could you please pass me my hat? I need to leave in a hurry, and I don't want to disturb your family."

My father reached up to the shelf above the coat rack and picked up the hat his friend was pointing to. He handed the hat to him with a smile.

"Thank you," said the man.

"No, thank *you* for your patience," said my father. "We're the ones holding up the works here."

There were several children in our family, and so after the church service was over, it took us a little while to get our coats from the coat rack in the vestibule and put them on. Twila and I, who were six and eight years old at the time, were responsible for helping the younger ones put on their coats and scarves, and that sometimes took awhile.

I looked up at the shelf again, noting the long line of men's hats that rested on it. A question came into my mind—a question that often lingered there. I decided to ask about it on the way home.

"Daddy," I began as he pulled out of the parking space near the side entrance to the church. "You know how all the men keep their hats on the shelf in the vestibule?"

"Except your daddy," said my mother. "You never see him putting his hat on the shelf."

"That's because I don't wear a hat," chuckled my father.

"Why don't you wear a hat?" asked my younger sister, Twila.

"I don't know," said Dad. "I've tried several times to wear a hat, but I just can't get used to the feeling of something sitting on my head." He looked over at my mother and grinned. "Your mommy would like to see me wear a hat."

"You would look nice wearing a hat," agreed my mother.

My father laughed. "Maybe I'll try it again sometime," he said.

"Daddy," I said, "You know how all the men put their hats on the shelf when they come into the church building?"

"Yes," said my father. "What about it?"

"Well," I said, "we sing a song in church that says 'put your feelings on the shelf.'"

My father began to sing.

The best way to have a revival

Is to pray and to read your Bible.

My mother joined in.

*Put your feelings on the shelf,
Treat your neighbor as yourself—
That's the best way to have a revival.*

"I don't understand," I said to my father, when he and my mother had finished singing, "how there is room up on that shelf for all the men's hats—and everybody's feelings. I've looked."

My mother laughed. "You can't see feelings," she said.

"Then how can you put them on the shelf?" I asked.

"Only in a manner of speaking," said my father, "can you put your feelings on the shelf. You don't actually pick them up with your hands and put them on the shelf. That's not possible."

"I'm mixed up," I said. "Why do we sing about it if we can't really do it?"

"Let's see," said my father slowly. "I'll try to explain it to you." He paused for a moment to think. Then he said, "You know what feelings are, don't you?"

"Yes," I told him. "Sometimes I have happy feelings, and sometimes I have angry feelings, and sometimes I have sad feelings."

"Ok," said my father. "And sometimes your feelings get hurt, right?"

"Yes," I said. My younger sisters and I squirmed a little in the back seat of the car and looked at each other. We were often guilty of hurting each other's feelings.

"Some people get their feelings hurt very easily because they are always thinking about themselves and wanting to have their own way all of the time," continued my father. "If we are going to be that way, then our minds will be full of angry thoughts. We will not have hearts full of love for others. God won't be able to work through us to draw others to Him."

"To 'put your feelings on the shelf' means to get them out of the way. It means to ask God to keep you sweet and not be so easily upset when you don't get your way, or when someone treats you unfairly."

"Why is that the best way to have a revival?" I asked.

"'Revival' means getting 'livened up,'" said my father. "Sinners get 'livened up' when the Lord saves them and gives them a new heart. Christians get 'livened up' when the Lord helps them overcome their weaknesses so they can be better witnesses for Him."

My sisters and I looked at each other again. We knew we needed to put our feelings on the shelf so we could be 'livened up.'

Children, do you know how to 'put your feelings on the shelf'?

Our wise saying this month comes from Proverbs 23:7a, which says, *For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.* The writer of this scripture tells us that our thoughts make us what we are. If we allow our minds to constantly dwell on our own feelings, we will become selfish people. We will treat others in a way that is not pleasing to the Lord.

It is good for us to dwell on the words of Jesus and to think about how He acted when He was here on Earth. The Bible is full of stories that tell us about how

He behaved in every circumstance of life. He was always kind and loving to others.

Jesus is our great Example. If we ask Him to help us act and speak as He did, we will always keep our feelings 'on the shelf' so we have room to reflect His goodness in our lives.

Activity

Here are some scriptures that help us understand how to put our feelings 'on the shelf'. See if you can fill in the blanks with the missing words. NOTE: You can check yourself by looking up each scripture with its given location.

1. "This is my commandment, that ye ____ one another as I have ____ you" (John 15:12).
2. "Rejoice with them that do ____, and weep with them that ____" (Romans 12:15).
3. "And be ye ____ one to another, tenderhearted, ____ one another, even as God for ____ sake hath ____ you" (Ephesians 4:32).
4. "But love ye your ____, and do ____, and ____, hoping for nothing again; and your ____ shall be great, and ye shall be the ____ of the Highest: for he is kind unto the ____ and to the ____" (Luke 6:35).
5. "Let your ____ so shine before men, that they may see your ____ works, and glorify your ____ which is in ____" (Matthew 5:16).

Answers to Last Month's Activity

1. Bethlehem
2. Nazareth
3. Cana
4. Capernaum
5. Jerusalem †

BIBLE LESSON OF THE MONTH

GEMS FROM THE BOOK OF ROMANS

JOY AND PEACE IN BELIEVING

Scriptures: Romans 15:13; John 3:16; Acts 10:43; I John 5:1, 5; I Peter 1:8; John 6:35; 7:38; 12:46; Romans 10:10, 11; Mark 9:23.

Romans 15:13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Acts 10:43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

I John 5:1 Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

5 Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?

I Peter 1:8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

John 6:35 And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.

John 7:38 He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

John 12:46 I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.

Romans 10:10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Mark 9:23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

Memory Verse: Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

—Romans 15:13.

Aim: To show that believing on Christ has its rewards.

INTRODUCTION

We Have a Hope

Blessed hope we have within us is an anchor to the soul,

It is both steadfast and sure;

It is founded on the promises of Father's written word,

And 'twill evermore endure.

We have a hope within our souls,

Brighter than the perfect day:

God has given us his Spirit,

And we want the world to hear it.

All our doubts are passed away.

—William G. Schell

What would it be like to try to live in this present world and not have any hope? A life of misery! Part of the meaning of *hope* is, "a person or thing on which one may base some expectations." The prophet Joel said, "The Lord will be the hope of his people" (Joel 3:16).

MEDITATIONS

FAITH AND HOPE—Romans 15:13—The God of hope—The writer of Hebrews said, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (11:1). Anyone who really knows God knows He is the God of hope. In believing in the God of hope, it will bring joy and peace to your soul. Through the power of the Holy Spirit in your life you may abound in hope.

BELIEVING ON CHRIST—John 3:16—God so loved—One of the most familiar verses in the Bible, and one of the most meaningful verses. Every Christian is a child of God, but this verse speaks of the One who was begotten by the power of God in the womb of a virgin named Mary. The only One so begotten, and the only One who was able to be the Savior of mankind,

The Way of Truth

through which it is possible to have eternal life. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1).

MANY WITNESSES—Acts 10:43—All the prophets—All the prophets directly, or indirectly, gave witness of the coming Messiah. Many of the verses in the Old Testament in which you find the word *Lord* are speaking of the One we know as Jesus Christ. That is the only name given among men whereby we can receive remission of sins.

ONLY ONE MEDIATOR—I John 5:1—Whosoever—"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (verse 12). It takes more than a head belief to be born of God. One must believe in his heart. If you really believe, you will love Him and show it by your actions. **Verse 5**—Another proof that you believe Jesus to be the Son of God is that you will have power to overcome the world. A child of God does not love the world.

GOD IS A SPIRIT—I Peter 1:8—Yet believing—According to the Scriptures, no human being has actually seen God, but that does not keep one from believing. With that believing, you are able to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. There are rewards in believing!

SALVATION IS REAL—John 6:35—Never hunger—Jesus said that He was the bread of life, and I believe Him. Many did not, and they went away saying, "This is a hard saying." But those who have eaten of Him are satisfied. Israel ate manna and hungered again. We can eat of the bread of life and never hunger for anything else.

THE INFLUENCE OF BELIEVING—John 7:38—Out of his belly—Once an individual believes on Christ, he becomes a vessel for God to fill and pour out upon others. The living waters that flow out of the believer originate with the Lord. Jesus gave the woman at the well that living water which is salvation with all its treasures. She immediately went into the city to share her newfound joy and peace. Many believed on Jesus as a result; others believed because they heard Him themselves. But, in each case, the believer received his own portion of living water and consequently allowed that water, which was full of peace and joy, to flow out from his life and influence others for righteousness. Something good always happens to the man or woman who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ!

MUCH DARKNESS—John 12:46—I am come—There is much darkness in the world, not only as far as sin and evil, but in the religious world as well. Two of the largest religious groups in the world number between two and three billion people. One of those two does not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Savior of the world. In fact, they don't believe there is a Savior. Among those who call themselves Christians, some do not believe you can be saved from all your sins and live a holy life. Nevertheless, Jesus came into the world a light. *Light* is understood here as truth. Darkness is sin, evil, and false doctrines.

If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and one another.

A CHANGE OF HEART—Romans 10:10—With the heart—The prophet said that the Lord takes out the stony heart and gives a heart of flesh. Salvation is not in religious rituals or ceremonies, but in a changed heart, which means a change in the way we live. **Verse 11**—One who has a new heart certainly has nothing to be ashamed of. Jesus said that if we are ashamed of Him, He would be ashamed of us.

A FATHER IN NEED—Mark 9:23—If you can believe—A son was vexed with demons. The nine disciples could not cast them out. Jesus appeared and the son's father said to Him, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us." Jesus said to the father, "It is not whether I can do anything, but can you believe?" The answer, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." The son was delivered and healed.

CONCLUSION

The father in Mark 9 was rewarded for the faith he did have! We have spoken of only a few rewards in this lesson. There are many, but the greatest of all is being delivered out of the prison house of sin—out of darkness—into the marvelous liberty and light of being a child of God. This liberty and freedom is offered to all, for Jesus tasted death for everyone, and whosoever will may come and drink of the water of life freely.

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

1. What does it really mean to believe on Christ?
2. Why is it that millions say that they believe on Christ but you see no change in their lives?
3. How many ways are there to have eternal life?
4. What did the prophet say about the heart?
5. What does it take to be able to overcome the world?
6. What did Jesus mean when He said He was the bread of life?
7. Have you experienced the joy and peace of believing on Christ? †

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.

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TRUE HUMILITY

2023 Hagerstown Convention Message by Bro. John Romero



WE WILL BEGIN with First Peter, chapter 5, verses 5 and 6: “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” Thank God for His Word. Thank God for His instructions.

The kingdom of God does not work based on ideas. The kingdom of God does not operate based on theories. You have to have the right experience in order to fulfill the things that are given to us in the Word of God. Here the Word of God tells us that we are to submit to one another. “Submit yourselves unto the elder.” There is a divine law of submission in the law of God. But we can’t just submit because God tells us to submit. We have to have the right kind of heart, the right kind of spirit to fulfill the things of God in our lives.

So let’s look at Ezekiel 36. I want to show you this in the Word of God because sometimes we read things in the Word of God and say, “Well, let’s do that.” You can’t just do some things without a true experience of salvation. God says we should be unified. God says we should be sanctified. We should operate as one. We should be one people. But we can’t do that unless we have the right heart and the right experience. Ezekiel 36:24-28 says, “For I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”

GOD REQUIRES OBEDIENCE

God says, “Listen, I want you to obey me. I want to be your God, but I can’t do that with that old, stony heart. I have to take that old, stony heart out of you and give you a new heart. When I give you a new heart, then I will cause you to obey my statutes and do my will.”

Ezekiel says, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit.” So we need a new heart and a new spirit. You can’t come out of the world and be the same person and operate in the kingdom of God. You have to have a new heart, a new spirit. God has to change you. God has to take that old, stony heart out of us so He can give us a new heart, a new spirit. Otherwise, we will be unable to follow God and serve God and do His will. We need God to do some things for us. We try to take people from the world and unify them and make them

one people, but it doesn’t work that way. You have to have an experience with God, salvation, a new heart, a new spirit. God has to take that stony heart out of us and give us a heart of flesh.

A NEW HEART IS NECESSARY

We cannot enjoy the things of God unless we have a new heart and a new spirit. We can’t enjoy salvation unless we are a new creature in Christ. We just can’t be the same old person. We need God to do something for us and change us. God knew this, so when He said to be submissive unto another, we cannot make that work unless we are the kind of creatures God has called us to be. We cannot be the old man and make the things of God work for us. We look around the Church of God and we see problems and divisions and all kinds of situations. Those come when people don’t have the right attitude, the right spirit, the right heart. When you have the right heart and the right spirit, God can help you to do the things you are supposed to do.

I Corinthians, chapter 3:1-4: “And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?” So Paul is saying, “Listen, we’re trying to make the church work here. We’re trying to make the people come together and be one. We have a problem here. We have a situation here. We can’t build a church with people who are carnal.”

He goes on to say in verses 9-13: “For we are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”

Paul said, “We’re trying to build the Church of God here. But there are some kinds of material God can’t use. We have gold, silver, and precious stones. We also have some wood, some hay, and some stubble. We’re going to take it all and put it on the fire and let the fire burn up the wood, the hay, and the stubble.” He’s talking about these carnal men that were trying to operate in the church. He said, “You are causing envy and strife and division.” The Church of God cannot work that way. We cannot operate with carnal people. We have to get

rid of all the wood, the hay, and the stubble in order for people to be encouraged and edified in the things of God.

SUBMISSION REQUIRES HUMILITY

Paul said, "I'm a wise master builder. We can't build the church with these kinds of material. Therefore, we need to make sure people have a right heart and are saved and sanctified." The Church of God is built with saved and sanctified people. Not unsaved people. We have to be saved and sanctified in order to fit and be one and be part of the temple of God.

Let's go back to our text in I Peter 5:5: "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." So submission is a divine attribute and it cannot be done by carnal people. Submission is not simply compliance. Submission requires humility and grace. In order to be submissive to the things of God and the will of God and God's plan, you have to be a humble person.

We're going to talk to you this morning about true humility, not just any kind of humility, but genuine humility that comes from God. Submission is not simply compliance. *Compliance* means, "to adhere to rules and regulations." We comply with many things in this world. You comply with the laws. The law says speed limit 65 and you try to comply. The law says pay your taxes and you try to comply. You may grumble and you may complain, but you comply. You may not like the laws and regulations, but you comply. If you don't like rules and regulations, don't live in California. I saw an article that said that California passed five new laws. These laws go into effect at weird times in the year, like July 1st. Why not at the beginning of the year? We have to comply; we can't be lawbreakers.

I'm not talking about compliance; I'm talking about submission. Submission is bigger than compliance. If you're just complying in the kingdom of God, then you need God to help you. We're not here to comply; we're here to submit. Submission is compliance with grace. Submission is obeying God without murmuring and complaining and kicking our feet. The children of Israel didn't submit, but they complied because they were carnal. The Old Testament was compliance; the New Testament is submission. May God help us to be submissive. The only way to be truly submissive is to be humble. Submission is part of the gospel. If you can't submit, you can't be saved. Submission requires humility, and humility is part of being saved.

I'm going to show you some scriptures about submission in the Word of God, because there are some people who don't believe in submission. "I do what I want, when I want, and how I want." That's not the kingdom of God. When we're saved, God takes that old carnal heart out and gives us a heart to submit and obey and serve God. That's the heart of the saint. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you."

So God gave man the Word of God to teach, to lead, to guide, and to feed the people of God with knowledge

and wisdom. God says, "You know what? When you're saved, you can be submissive." You can submit to the authority of the ministry with a good heart and a good attitude. If we're not careful, we'll let the spirit of the world get inside of us. The world is rebellious and stubborn. We don't want that kind of spirit in our midst. We want to be a submissive people. The only way we can be a submissive people is to humble ourselves.

So we're not here to comply; we're here to submit. That doesn't mean we agree with everything we hear. If we're submitting, we're doing it without complaining and dragging our feet and causing a big problem. We're doing it with the right heart, with the right attitude. When I was being pastored, I didn't agree with everything the pastor did. A couple of things she did made me a little angry. But you know what I did? I submitted. I said, "Lord, this is my pastor and I have confidence in my pastor that she's looking out for my good. She's watching for my soul." I have news for you. Pastors can make mistakes. Pastors are still human. God help us to understand that.

Ephesians 5:20-25—"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." So this thing works in two different directions. He says, "Husbands, love your wives." A better translation for that word *love* would be *respect*. Then it says, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands." So there is a submission in the kingdom of God. In the world we're getting farther and farther away from this. There is still an order of things in the kingdom of God. The husband is still the head of the home. Young sisters in the church, if you're not ready to submit, don't get married. If you don't have a spirit of submission, then don't get married because God is going to require you to be submissive to your husband. The young people say, "I want to get a man who is going to love me." That goes two directions. Not only do you want to get a man who loves you, but you want to make sure you can be submissive. If you don't have the right spirit, the right attitude, you can cause problems. People who aren't submissive, whether it be in the home, in the church, or in the pews, then you have problems.

SUBMIT TO ONE ANOTHER

God laid down the principles for us in I Peter 5:5: "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another." We're all to submit to one another. None of us are better than the other. None of us are higher than the other; we're all one. "And be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble." God doesn't just ignore the proud; He resists them. God isn't going to let you have your way.

Christ Himself is the true measure of humility. He is our standard. Some people can act humble. We're not

here to act humble; we're here to *be* humble. Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." When we learn of Christ, we learn humility. We become like Jesus. We cannot follow Christ and not be a humble person. Every true Christian is a humble person in a genuine way.

God says He gives grace to the humble. Grace is the help from heaven that God gives us to get saved and to be saved. You need grace. God doesn't give grace to proud people; God gives grace to humble people. You can't be saved without grace. We are saved by grace, we are kept by grace, and God only gives grace to the humble. If you want God to help you this morning, you need to humble yourself. Get rid of your pride. Shake off your pride. Quit living in your pride and get saved and get right with God, because that will give you grace. If you humble yourself, that's all God is asking. God's not asking you to give all kinds of stories and explanations about where you are and who you are. God says, "Just humble yourself and I will help you."

WHO IS GREATEST IN THE KINGDOM?

Matthew 18:1—"At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" That's a worldly attitude. Who's the greatest? Who's the best? Who's the strongest? Who's the handsomest? Who's the most popular? Who's the richest? That's the way the world thinks. The disciples had a little bit of a worldly attitude here. Matthew 18:2-4—"And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." But Jesus answered that question about who was the greatest. It was a little child that came and humbled himself. He said, "Let's see you humble yourself and become as a little child, or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven."

You can't be a big, proud, macho man and go to heaven. You have to humble yourself. When I was a young man, I grew up in the world and I did all kinds of things. People used to tell me, "You're tough." Being as dumb as I was, I believed that a little bit. I believed I was somebody in the world. I felt like I could just do what I wanted and have what I wanted. But when God began to break me down and convict me, I thank God one day I realized I was nothing. I'm a nobody really. Who do I think I am that I have something to be proud of? What am I proud of? Whatever I think I am, somebody in the world is better. Somebody is stronger than I am. Somebody has more than I do. Whoever you think you are in this world, there is somebody that can outdo you. You think you're tough? There's somebody tougher. You think you're rich? There's somebody richer. You think you're handsome? There's somebody more handsome. You think you're beautiful? Believe me, there's a lot more people more beautiful than you are. I'm just giving you reality this morning. People are so proud of how they look. People are proud as peacocks. Pride is

not just something you do. There is such a thing as a proud look. One of the things God hates is a proud look. Pride is the condition of a man's heart.

I heard a preacher say one time that if you take a peacock and you pluck out all of its feathers and you put it out in the yard, guess what it'll do? He'll stick his stub up because he thinks he still has all his feathers. He doesn't know. That pride is part of his nature. Pride is part of people's nature. They think they have to be somebody, prove something, or be something. God said, "You are nothing." We need to come to the place where we realize we are nothing and come to God like a little child. Little children don't go around bragging and talking about how great they are and how wonderful they are. They are innocent little children. If you don't become like a little child, you can't get into heaven. Unless you humble yourself like a little child, you can't be saved. Every single one of you who is saved this morning had to humble yourself like a little child. You had to realize, "I'm a nobody, I'm nothing." Some of us started out as big, tough guys. We thought we were somebody. God had to whittle us down a little bit, to bring us down to a certain level before we could get saved. May God help you to get cut down to size, because that's good for you. That's what God wants. The world is going to say, "Look like this, dress like this, act like this." Worldly pride is not going to heaven.

PRIDE IS A WALL

Pride is a wall between man and God. You know why? Because God resists the proud. God is in your way. There is a wall between you and God and that wall is pride. The wall of pride will be the damnation of many souls. Many people will go to hell because of pride. People get themselves into a bad situation because of pride, because of their worldly activities and their sins. People get themselves in all kinds of complex situations—relationships, financial troubles, and all kinds of things. They get themselves in big messes. When you go fishing and cast your reel, sometimes that reel will get all wound up. They call it a rat's nest. When I've done that and tried to untangle the mess, after a while I got frustrated. You know what you have to do? You have to cut the whole line out. Sometimes people get their lives all tangled up like a fishing reel and wonder, "How do I get out of this situation?" Let me tell you something, there is a way to get out of it. Humble yourself. Let God take care of it. You don't have to take care of everything.

The devil tricks people—"You have to take care of this, fix this, and fix that." Some things you may have to take care of, but not everything because God knows what a mess we make of our lives. God says, "If you humble yourself, I'll take care of that. I'll help you. I'll take care of those situations." People buy self-help books, see a psychiatrist, go to counseling. Some people even try to go to church. Every church can't help you. Only truth can help you. Only Christ can help you. God does not need a lot of explanation. He doesn't need you to go to counseling and analyze everything and unfold everything and try to fix every little situation in your life. He just wants you to humble yourself. If you humble yourself, God will take care of a lot of things. Many people get themselves all messed up. I've thought

to myself, *If people would just come to church, come to the altar, and just humble themselves, God will take care of a lot of things.*

Do you want some grace? Do you know what grace is? Grace is divine help. Grace is power from God. If you want grace from God, power from God, then you need to humble yourself. God will give you the grace you need to live this life. If you're saved, don't get proud now. You still need grace. When you get into a hard situation and can't work things out, or see your way out of things, things get complex and complicated, then stay humble and God will bring you out, no matter what. That's a hard thing to do. People have a hard time humbling themselves. People have a hard time getting help from God. All God is looking for is for us to show some humility and He will help us.

SAUL OF TARSUS HAD TO SUBMIT

Isaiah 57:15 says, "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." The word *contrite* actually means, "crushed." Life can crush you, life can take you down, life can bring hard things to you. No matter how high and lofty God is, He can come down to our level and help us if we'll show God a humble spirit. Think about how high and mighty Saul of Tarsus was. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He spoke like five languages. He was a powerful man in the Hebrew church. He had authority to go and take the Christians and put them in prison. He set out to do that one day. God humbled him on the road to Damascus. He went from a high and mighty man to a humble, contrite Christian man who bowed at the feet of Christ one day. God changed him just like that. All God required was for Saul to humble himself. There he was walking with all this authority and power. He had the backing of all these religious leaders, and he was going to go to Damascus and persecute the church. But the Lord spoke to Saul that day: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"

Saul said, "Who is this?"
"It is the Lord."

Saul humbled himself that day. He didn't have to do all kinds of explaining. The Lord knew Saul's life, knew what he was doing, what he had been involved in. God knew everything about Saul. God knows what you're doing. God knows where you are. God knows that you're walking the high and mighty road. He's going to speak to you and ask, "Will you humble yourself? Will you get saved? Will you give your heart to me?" That's all He's asking for. He's not asking for all kinds of complicated things. He just wants people to be humble. Are you humble? Are you a genuinely, humble person? Being humble goes a long way with God.

Let's go to James, chapter 4, verses 6 and 7: "But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." What's the key to resisting the devil? Submitting yourself to God. How do you submit? Be humble, and God will give you grace. Thank God, there

is still grace to resist the devil. Verses 8-10: "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up." Again, if we humble ourselves, God will lift us up. God will bring us to the place where we need to be.

God is looking for a little bit of humility. Do people have enough humility to ask God to help them? Do people have so much pride in their hearts that they can't bow down before God? Let me tell you something, you are going to bow down before God some day. No matter who we are, one day every knee shall bow and confess. Every person is going to bow before the Lord one day and confess that Jesus is Lord. Why not have some humility now?

GOD'S MINISTRY MUST BE HUMBLE

If anyone needs to be an example of humility, it should be God's ministry who, many times, bear the brunt of the most difficult situations the church faces. Our attitude should never be anything less than genuine humility. No matter what we face as the leadership of the Church of God, we have to do it with humility. We can't ever exhibit anything less than genuine humility. In fact, we should be examples of humility. God called us not to be masters or dictators. He called us to be servants. A minister is a servant, and the spirit of a servant is humility.

Remember what happened to Moses? The Bible says that he was a humble man on the face of the earth. God used him, but he got out of fix with God one day. Moses lost his humility one day. The people of God provoked him, and God told him to strike the rock and get some water for the people. So Moses struck the rock and said, "Drink ye, rebels." That little incident cost him. He lost his humility, his meekness. God told him for that reason he could not enter the Promised Land. Moses suffered for that. That is an example to us. Our job is to make God look good. What did God say to Moses? "You didn't sanctify me for the people. You didn't make me look good, therefore, I will have to punish you." May God help us to be true representatives of His. We're ambassadors for Christ. May God help us to be humble people. One of the greatest attributes of the ministry should still be humility.

There was a man named Saul. He was made the first king of Israel. What happened to Saul? Saul was little in his own eyes. He was a humble man. That's why God chose him. He was a tall man, too. He was a head taller than anybody else. Do you know how humble Saul was? When they went to find him to make him king, he was hiding. He didn't want to be in the limelight. They told him to get out from his hiding because he's king. What happened to Saul now? He changed. He got the bighead. He thought, *I'm somebody. I can change. I can do my things my own way. The Lord told me to kill all the Amalekites. He told me to kill all the animals, but I saved some for myself.* He changed God's Word to suit himself. We cannot change anything in the Word of God to suit ourselves. Saul ended up losing his kingship, and in the end he lost his life.

Remember King Herod? Herod went out and made this great oration. He was speaking in great words, and the people said, "This is the voice of a God and not man." Herod did not give God the glory, so God sent an angel and smote him with worms that day. God killed him. Why? Because he was presenting the very essence of pride and arrogance. He didn't want to give God any glory. There was something he should have said to give God the glory.

Do you know why America is in trouble today? We won't give God the glory anymore. We won't give God any credit anymore. We think we've done all these things. We used to pride ourselves that we were a Christian nation, and now *Christian* is almost a bad word. People are rebelling. They are rejecting the Word of God. We used to be proud that we had a Christian heritage. Now we're running from it. We're throwing God away. We're throwing God on the back burner. If people had their way, they would burn all the Bibles, burn down all the churches. They would close the doors to the church. Remember the pandemic? What got closed? The churches. They wanted to close the churches. They wanted to keep open the bars and the marijuana places. Thank God, there were a few people who fought back. May God help us to stand.

HUMILITY HAS THE ABILITY TO BACK UP

Humility has the ability to back up. Humility has the ability to put pride in reverse when God gives you salvation. If you say that you are a genuinely humble person, then you can back up when you need to. You can go back to the place where you got off track and attempt to fix things. I don't care who you are. There is going to come a time in your life that you are going to have to make an apology for something to someone. Nobody is so perfect that they never have to make an apology. If you've been saved for twenty years and you've never said sorry to anybody, then something is wrong with you, because we've all done things and made mistakes. If you've been married for ten years and have never said sorry to your husband or wife, God help you. Where is the humility? We're all human. There are going to be times in our lives when we'll say, "Oops, I made a mistake. I misjudged that thing." Humility is the ability to understand our mistakes and try to fix them. Not five years from now, but right away, as soon as possible. Humble people don't just let things lie out there. "I know I hurt your feelings. I know I made a mistake." Humility seeks to fix things as soon as possible. That's humility. There are a lot of people who can't say they're sorry. Humility can say *I'm sorry* when necessary.

Do you know what happened in the Corinthian church? In I Corinthians 5, Paul wrote to them and said, "Listen, it has been reported commonly that there is fornication among you." So they had a really bad situation. Let me refresh your memory a little bit. In II Corinthians, Paul is following up on a situation in I Corinthians. II Corinthians 5:1-6: "It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up [speaking to the whole church], and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this

deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?"

A PROBLEM IN CORINTH

Paul was talking about a situation that was going to affect the whole church. He said, "Listen, instead of delivering this man to Satan to the destruction of the flesh, put judgment on him. Tell him he's wrong. Tell him he's in sin, and help him to get right with God. You may have to suffer. Make sure you get fornication out of your midst. If you leave a little leaven in your midst, it's going to leaven the whole lump." Paul tried to help them. He told them their glorying was not good. They were acting like it was okay. That's the problem in the religious world today. People don't deal with sin. They just let it run rampant. They tell people that it's okay if they're sinners. God understands. No, God doesn't understand that. Jesus can save from sin. He came to give grace to quit sinning, but the Corinthian church was allowing sin to become like leaven, so Paul had to help them.

Now, in II Corinthians, chapter 7, verses 8-11, Paul is trying to fix the situation: "For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent: for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter." In that matter, Paul tried to help them, not just the two people who committed fornication, but all that were involved in it. He told them that they needed to repent and get this thing behind them.

Do you know people need to be told some things? It might not make them feel good, but it's for their spiritual good. Thank God those people repented. Paul said, "Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation." Sometimes people's lives are unclear, they're murky, they're muddy because they're in sin. They haven't cleared things up. Thank God you can clear things up in a real way. You can have a clear experience. Isn't that what you want? Do you want a clear walk with God? The only way you can be clear with God is to repent. The only way you can repent is to humble yourself.

Repentance and humility go hand in hand. The reason why people can't repent is that they can't be humble. If you can't be humble, you can't repent. People keep pride in their lives. They stay how they

are. Pride can keep you out of heaven. It can send you right to hell. Thank God for true repentance. True repentance is still necessary to receive salvation. Do you know why you don't see people really truly saved anymore in the world today? Because you don't hear too much preaching about true repentance. You just hear about believing in Jesus. "I signed a card. I believe in Christ." Listen, I tell people all the time, if you go to a church and have been there for months and months and months, and you never heard a message on repentance, you need to leave that place. Repentance is the foundational message of the Bible. It was preached by John the Baptist, preached by Christ Himself, and the apostles. They all preached the same message. Repent, and be baptized. *Repentance* means, "a turning from sin with godly sorrow." When you repent from sin, you won't go back to it, by the grace of God. Repentance is not confession. Repentance is the foundation for salvation.

II Corinthians, chapter 2, verses 5-7: "But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part: that I may not overcharge you all. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." If God forgives him, you need to forgive him, too. Verses 8-11: "Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." Paul is saying, "All of you who are involved, if you don't humble yourselves and forgive him, then this is going to continue on. It's going to become bigger and bigger and become like a sore."

We need to heal some things, don't we? We go through some hard things, but God said, "Let us have the spirit of forgiveness." When people repent, we need to forgive them, too. If we don't have a humble attitude, these hard things will stay with us. It's going to be a cancer in our midst. It's going to come up all the time. It's going to be a pain. May the Lord help us. Humility is willing to forgive and to forget. Sometimes humility is a hard lesson to learn.

Do you know why God gave Paul "a thorn in the flesh"? To keep him humble. II Corinthians, chapter 12, verse 7—"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure." So Paul understood what God had done to him. Verses 8-10: "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong." God used Paul in a great way. He used him in a greater

way than any of the other apostles. But God knew Paul was still human. Listen, I don't care how saved and sanctified we are, we're still human. We're still frail in some ways. We still have weaknesses.

Paul asked God three times to remove that thorn in the flesh. God didn't remove the thorn in the flesh, but He gave Paul the grace to accept it. Paul was human. There are things in life we don't want to accept. We need to listen to God. Thank God, Paul listened to God. He said, "My grace is sufficient for thee." So what did God do with Paul? He said to Paul, "I know your weakness. I don't want you to get away from me. I want you to stay saved so I'm going to give you a thorn in the flesh." There are some things in your life that God gave you to keep you humble. Maybe God will help you to understand that today. None of us can rely on our accomplishments. Every day we still need God's grace anew in our lives. This is a beautiful lesson on how God recognizes human frailty. He tries to keep us humble, no matter who we are. Sometimes God uses affliction to teach us humility. David said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray."

We in the Church of God love to believe we are so right. We thank God for the truth He has given to us. We appreciate what He has given to us. We believe we have the right doctrines, the right standards, and the right system, but don't we have to temper all of our rightness with some humility? Is there enough humility in our midst? Don't we have to temper all of our rightness with some humility, some forbearance, and some longsuffering? Does everybody have to see everything exactly as we see it? Where's our longsuffering? Where's our humility? Are we always so right that we've lost our ability to see anybody else's perspective? Remember, we don't always have to be right, but we always have to be humble. We must always be humble. Some people think *I always have to be right. That's my calling, that's my gift. That's my place to be right all the time.* That's not my gift. My calling should be that I be humble all the time. I have to get to that place through genuine humility.

Did God call us to set everybody else straight? Is that your calling? That's not our calling. I know people like that. They think their place is to set everybody right. "That's not the right thing. Let me tell you how to fix that." That's not our calling; that's not our place. There are people who think they're always right. They're never wrong. Listen, your Christian experience goes beyond being in church. Keep a humble attitude in every area of your life. God did not call us to set everybody straight or to correct their mistakes.

Humility can allow things and people around us to not be perfect. Some people could do some things that are not right, but we don't have to correct them right away. We can forbear with them. "That's okay. I can live with that. I don't have to set everybody straight right away with everything. I have some humility. I'm not here to rule over your life."

Humility is forbearance with grace. It's longsuffering with grace; it's patience with grace. Humility never looks for personal advantage. Humility never seeks the limelight and the center stage. Humility is content to stay in the background.

HUMILITY AND CHARITY GO TOGETHER

Humility and charity go hand in hand. I Corinthians, chapter 13, verses 4-8: "Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away." It's the same way with humility. Humility never faileth. Whatever the situation you face in your life, take the humble route. Humility can submit things to God. You can put things in God's hands.

I want to read Matthew 23:12—"And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted." We don't have to have our way right now. We don't have to have things to be the way we want them right now. God can exalt us in due time. There's a time for God to help us. Humility can accept the fact that people can look at you and think you are wrong. If you know you're right with God, submit to God what they may think of you. Let God have it. He will prove things out in due time. Jesus was right, wasn't He? He submitted to God. Three days later, Jesus proved to the world that He was the Son of God. We don't have to manifest a haughty attitude. Be humble. God will fight our battles for us. We don't have to fight our battles alone. Submit to God, and He'll help us in due time.

The last scripture I want to read is Micah 6:8—"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

The Lord bless you. †

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NEVER GIVE UP

Radio Message by Bro. Greg Tyler

THE TIME has now come to bring to you the Word of God. The title of our message is, "Never Give Up." For our text of scripture, I'd like to refer you to First Corinthians, chapter 15, verse 58, where the apostle Paul said, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." If we are going to live a successful Christian life, we must have a steadfast determination to never give up.

The moment an individual is saved, the very moment that individual's sins are washed away, Satan and all the powers of darkness begin to work and labor, trying to get that individual to lose salvation. This is why we need the determination to never, ever give up.

I know that there are a lot of listeners in our radio audience who believe once we are saved, it is impossible to lose our salvation. Beloved, that is not according to the Word of God. The Word of God tells us that there is a conflict going on. The Word of God tells us that unless we take heed we're going to lose, we're going to fall, we're going to falter, and we're going to be departed from the kingdom of God.

The apostle Paul alludes to the Olympics, as such, at least, a race. He said that when a person begins a race, it doesn't necessarily mean he's going to finish that race. Further, Paul says, in effect, "Not everyone who starts, crosses the finish line." What does that tell you? To start in this race is to begin the Christian warfare, but you must press on, you must labor on, you must never give up or else you will not cross the finish line a victor.

In order for us to hear the blessed words, *well done, thou good and faithful servant*, at the end of the way, we must be steadfast and unmoveable. We must always be abounding in the work of the Lord. The Lord did not save us to put us on the road of "do nothing," but when He saved us from our sins, He put us into the family of God, and there is a place to labor for every child of God. If you don't labor in the place that God has chosen for you to fill, then you are going to lose that which you have gained. Don't be deceived. It is possible to lose what you have gained. It is necessary for us "to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip," the apostle Paul said.

In Philippians, Paul said, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Paul said here that he had not apprehended, he had not reached the apex, but he was determined to run a successful Christian race. At the end of the life of the apostle Paul, he was able to say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith." He did what he aimed to do, and

that was to *never give up*. He was steadfast. He was unmovable. He labored on for the Lord, whatever came his way. He pressed toward the mark.

Dear Listener, I want you to feel the necessity of this thing. If you're going to cross the finish line, if you're going to enter successfully and victoriously into heaven, you must press toward the mark, for there is a battle going on. There is a devil in the world, and he is after you and me. Unless we put up opposition and fight against the forces of darkness, we're going to be conquered. One reason why the world is in such a terrible state is because people are giving in to the devil. They are doing the devil's bidding. But Beloved, if we're going to live a successful Christian life, we must overcome the devil. We must defeat the devil.

I want to remind you that in your Christian walk, you need to reach out. You need to covet earnestly the best gifts. You need to determine to be all that God would have you to be. You need to be determined, by the grace of God, to fulfill your potential in the gospel. You need to pray, you need to labor, you need to fast, you need to get your soul fed. You need to reach out to God day by day, because if you don't give this Christian race your very best effort, then you're going to fail, you're going to falter, and the devil is going to overcome you. Soon you will find yourself on the outside looking in. That doesn't have to happen. God has promised to give you power over all the power of the enemy. There is victory in Jesus! There will only be victory when you give the Lord your best.

Many people work hard when it comes to their business. They work hard when they're at their job, but when it comes to the Christian race, they just twiddle their thumbs. They drag their feet. No wonder there are not more real Christians, because this is the greatest battle of all time. Let me tell you, Beloved, there is no battle so fierce as the battle every Christian is engaged in. If you're going to live a successful Christian life, you're going to have to fight the good fight of faith. You're going to have to overcome. You're going to have to defeat the devil.

One thing we need to do if we're going to cross the finish line is to cleanse ourselves. The apostle Paul said in II Corinthians 7:1, "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Some might say that it is impossible to live holy, but I'm telling you on the authority of God's Word, that without holiness, no man shall see the Lord. This is something we must do daily. We must endeavor to perfect holiness in the fear of God. We need to live clean. We need to live close to the Lord.

In Ephesians, chapter 4, beginning with verse 11, we read: "And he 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, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Oh, Dear Christian, if you're going to live this Christian life successfully, you must reach out. You must pattern your life after Jesus Christ. Yes, reach

out to be that perfect man. Reach out to be measured to the stature of the fulness of Christ. Now I know that none of us are perfect in the sense that we never make a mistake. None of us are going to be fully like Christ. No, He was the Son of God, but He is our pattern. He is the one we should pattern our lives after, and He is the one we should reach out to. Just because it might be impossible to be fully like Christ doesn't mean we shouldn't try to pattern our lives after His example. We should try to be as much like Christ as we possibly can be. That should be our aim. That should be our goal. Reach out, press on, press toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

"Be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord," the apostle Paul said. Sometimes the devil might try to make you feel like all of your efforts are in vain, but if you're laboring for God, if you're living right and reaching out, and giving your very best, your labor is *not* in vain in the Lord. There is a God in heaven, and He will avenge His own elect which cry day and night unto Him, even though He might bear long with him. Mark it down, Beloved, the only life that is worth living is the Christian life. †

RADIO LOG

The Way of Truth Broadcast

Alvin A. Craig, Radio Minister

(Aired on Sundays unless otherwise noted.)

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Bro. Hezekiah Lamey, Host Pastor

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

2024 INTERNATIONAL
CHURCH OF GOD CONVENTION
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Bro. Gregory E. Tyler, Host Pastor

Please pray for the success of
these meetings!

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