

Basic Bible Lessons

O.P. Baird

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INTRODUCTION

I had known of brother O.P. Baird for many years, but It was only recently that my wife and I had the privilege of meeting him and his wife. We found them to be, as we had expected, a very kind and gracious Christian couple, fully committed to the service of their Lord.

Having worked in the U.S.A. for much of their lives, they moved to Seoul, Korea, for several years, to help with the Lord's work in that part of the world. In doing so, they not only were a tremendous help to the Koreans but they also set an example for older brethren in their own country, to answer the call of the great commission.

The Bairds presently make their home in Searcy, Arkansas, where they are working with a nearby congregation.

BASIC BIBLE LESSONS was initially written as a guide for home Bible study, but we felt that the material warranted being printed in book form. It will be valuable for personal, home, and class study here in the States, and also we plan to print it in various foreign countries. We certainly thank brother Baird for making this material available for publication.

Please read these lessons carefully, and study them along with the scriptures, to gain the greatest benefit. If we can be of further help, please let us know.

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Lesson One

Introductory Lesson

Each lesson in this book can be read in only a few minutes and is intended to be suggestive of further Bible study. It is hoped that this study will be profitable both for Christians and for those who are not yet Christians.

Before going into a study of the Bible teaching we shall give attention to the Bible itself and the importance of knowing and following its teachings. We shall also point out some reasons for accepting the scriptures as reliable and for believing their testimony of Jesus.

Bible Translations

The Old Testament was written in the Hebrew language and the New Testament in Greek. Therefore most of us must depend on translations. The translation used in this book is the King James Version (KJV) because it is still the one most widely read. The KJV is also called the Authorized Version because the translation was authorized by King James the First of England. It was published in 1611. There were a number of English versions before that, and those versions were used and compared in the production of the KJV. It took fifty years for the KJV to become widely accepted.

Because of changes in the English language and the discovery of manuscripts of the Bible older than the ones available to the translators of the KJV, a need came to be felt for a revision. The style of language in which the Bible was written was the form used by the common people in everyday speech and writing. Therefore a translation should be in the everyday speech of the people who will use the translation. The KJV was in that kind of language when it was translated; but, after such a long period of time, some of its language forms are no longer in common use.

Various scholars made translations, but the first widely accepted revision made by a group of outstanding Hebrew and Greek scholars in the English-speaking world was the English Revised Version (ERV), the New Testament part being published in 1881 and the complete Bible in 1885. The translation committee was composed of both, British and American scholars. The American members of the committee published their own revision, the American Standard Version (ASV), the New Testament appearing in 1900 and the whole Bible in 1901. There is little difference between the ERV and the ASV.

The next important translation by an outstanding group of scholars was the Revised Standard Version (RSV). The New Testament portion was

published in 1946 and the complete Bible in 1952.

After the King James Version was produced, a number of manuscripts of the Bible and portions of it were discovered which were much older than the manuscripts that had been available to the KJV translators. Many variations were found in the manuscripts, both in the newly found ones and the previously known ones. The variations are nearly all minor copyists errors which did not affect the teaching of the scriptures. Nevertheless, scholars spent many years comparing manuscripts to produce a text as nearly like the original text as possible. This revised text was available to the later translators.

It is suggested that the reader of these lessons find each scripture quoted or to which reference is made in these lessons and read each with its context (the verses before and after it). The context often has much to do with understanding the meaning. A verse alone, out of its context, sometimes appears to teach something it does not teach.

The Necessity of Knowledge

In order to be saved, sinners must come to Christ who has the power to save. That requires gaining a knowledge of God's truth which produces faith in Him. Our knowledge of the Lord comes from the Bible. Of course, we cannot gain a complete knowledge of God. We can know only what He has revealed to us. God does not require us to know everything in His revealed word in order to be saved, but we must know the Lord. We must know certain things about His grace and His will for us.

Escaping from the Pollutions of the World Through Knowledge

In the following passage notice how people escape from the pollutions of the world: "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Peter 2:20-21). We must know Christ and His way of righteousness, and also walk in it.

Some think that if a person turns back from the way of righteousness to the pollutions of the world he had not escaped from them in the first place. But note that this passage states that those who turned had escaped. They knew the way of righteousness and then turned back after escaping the sinful pollutions. But, praise God, if they can love the Lord again and turn back to

Him they can be forgiven. It is true that there were some, called antichrists, associated with the early Christians, who went out from them because they were not of them (1 John 2:18-19), but, as shown in the passage in Second Peter, there were others who turned back to that from which they had escaped.

Condemned Without Knowledge

Those who do not know God will be condemned forever if they do not learn of Him: "... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

All Spiritual Blessings Come Through Knowledge

Everything pertaining to life and godliness comes through knowledge of the Lord: "According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3).

Made Free by Knowledge

Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). People cannot be made free unless they know the truth which was given for that purpose.

With these truths of scripture before us, we can understand why the apostle Paul counted the knowledge of Christ of such value that he wrote, "... I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Philippians 3:8).

The Bible is the source of God's revealed truth, and sinners can come to Christ and be saved only after gaining knowledge of that truth which produces faith in Christ. He has the power to save.

Lesson Two: Reliability of the Scriptures 1

The Christian faith is based on certain facts about Jesus. In explaining the facts of the gospel. Paul wrote, "...that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures: and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures..." (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Then Paul tells of some of Christ's appearances after His resurrection.

Jesus was, and is, the Son of God. He proved that by His resurrection. If we believe He arose we have no trouble believing that He came from God the Father and that all His teachings were true and His promises sure.

Everything we know about Jesus comes from the scriptures. Therefore our faith in Him depends on our confidence in the reliability of the scriptures that tell of Him.

Early Origin of the New Testament

The Bible has had many critics. Until recently many of them said that there was no evidence that the New Testament was written before the third or fourth century (the 200's or 300's A.D.). That would give plenty of time for people to Invent the stories about Jesus' miracles. Including His resurrection. They said this because the oldest known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament were fourth century copies. Critics no longer claim such late origin for these scriptures because parts of manuscripts of the New Testament have been found going back almost to the very days of the apostles.

Fragments of early copies of the New Testament have been found on papyrus, a writing material made from reeds that grew mainly in the marshes of Egypt. There are no known complete copies of the New Testament on this material. However, only a piece, no matter how small, of a New Testament book shows that the book existed when the copy was made.

There are three principle groups of papyri of New Testament writings. Most of these were discovered after the beginning of our own century.

One group of papyri was bought by Chester Beatty in Cairo, Egypt, in the 1930's. These contain the oldest copies we have of Paul's letters, and they date from the third century.

Another group of such writings was likely smuggled out of Egypt. It was bought by Mr. Adler in England and is now in the Bodmer Library in Geneva, Switzerland. In this collection is a complete copy of John and another manuscript with part of John and part of Luke. Both date from about 200 A.D.

Still another group is in the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England. In this collection is a small piece of papyrus containing a few verses from the eighteenth chapter of John. It is called the Rylands Fragment .457 and was found in Egypt in 1920. This is the oldest known bit of the New Testament. Some scholars date it as early as 125 A.D. The apostle John is thought to have died about 96 AD., so this fragment goes back almost to the very days of the apostles. It proves that the book of John existed about 125 A.D. and had existed long enough to circulate as far as Egypt. That kind of

evidence should be enough to convince us that John himself, an eye-witness of the works of Jesus and of His resurrection, wrote of the things which he saw and heard (1 John 1:1-4).

Besides actual copies of New Testament books, in part or in whole, there is another evidence of the early origin of the New Testament. Christians who wrote in the second century mentioned those writings and quoted from them. These were such men as Justin Martyr who wrote about 160 A.D. The mention of many books of the New Testament even by the heretic Marcion, about 150 A.D., proves their existence at that early date. In the second century Irenaeus testified that there were four accounts of the gospel, though he did not name Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

These men lived and wrote less than a hundred years from the time the New Testament books were being written. They were in a position to know what the beliefs of the body of Christians had been and what writings had been accepted by them from the time of the writing. They lived close enough to the time of Jesus to have known people who saw Jesus and who heard the apostles preach.

Abundance of Evidence

The events in the life of Jesus, including His resurrection, are better attested than any other events occurring so long ago. For example, there are only nine or ten good manuscripts of Caesar's Gallic Wars, and the oldest of these was written about nine hundred years after Caesar's time. In contrast, there are nearly three thousand manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, or parts of it, dating from early in the second century (the 100's) until the invention of printing in Germany in the middle of the fifteenth century. There are many thousands of other manuscripts written in that period which pertain to the New Testament, proving the early origin of it.

The Account of Jesus' Resurrection Was Not a Later Invention

Informed people no longer say the New Testament was written later than the first century. Some might suppose that the story of Jesus' resurrection was Invented at a later time and inserted into the account. To accept that theory it would have to be assumed that, after the documents had been accepted by the Christians throughout the world, someone Invented the story of Jesus' resurrection, and all His other miracles, and somehow got them accepted into the account already believed and well known. Furthermore, it would have to be assumed that, of the many manuscripts in existence, only the ones with the forgeries were perpetuated. This is so unlikely that it is sim-

ply ruled out.

It might be claimed that the very first Christians invented the stories and, several years later, when the gospels were written, the writers Included them because they had become widely believed. But that speculation is unreasonable in view of the sudden beginning of the church on the firm conviction that Jesus, who had been crucified only a few days before, had been raised and was alive.

In our next lesson we shall consider the claim that the New Testament has been so corrupted by copyists that it is no longer reliable. This claim is made because of thousands of variations in the handwritten manuscripts.

Lesson Three

Reliability of the Scriptures 2

In the last lesson we saw that the New Testament was written in the first century, and there is no reason to think it was not written by the apostles of Jesus and their co-workers. This lesson deals with another point in regard to the reliability of the New Testament.

Before printing came into use, the Bible was perpetuated by hand copying. It is extremely difficult to copy large amounts of material without making mistakes. When the Greek New Testament was printed and circulated, people found differences between the printed copy and their copies. They became concerned as to how many differences there were and as to whether or not they were of a serious nature.

Greek scholars set to work examining and comparing the vast number of manuscripts to try to correct the mistakes. A whole new field of scholarship developed called “textual criticism.” Some very old manuscripts were discovered which were examined along with the thousands of later ones. One was found in the Vatican and is called the “Vatican Manuscript.” Another was found in a monastery on Mt. Sinai and is called the “Sinaitic Manuscript.” Both of these were written in the fourth century.

The Nature of the Variations

Most of the variations In the manuscripts are due to such mistakes as misspelling words, skipping words or lines, and transposing words. Such mistakes as that are not serious because they do not affect the meaning and are easily corrected by comparing manuscripts.

Very few variations are due to intentional change by the copyist. He might see what he thinks is an error and undertake to change it. If it really is

an error and his correction is the right one no harm is done, but it might not be an error at all or if it is, his correction might not be the right one. In that case he creates a new variation which might be perpetuated by later copyists. Another kind of intentional change was placing into the text some note or explanation that a previous copyist had written in the margin. There is a variation in the fifth chapter of John that is thought to be due to this kind of change. In the KJV the passage reads, "...waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had" (John 5:3b-4). This is not found in the revised translations. Some of the old Greek manuscripts have this while others do not. Neither the Vatican nor Sinaitic has it. It is thought likely that some early copyist knew the belief that brought the people to the pool and made a note of explanation in the margin, and some later copyist put it into the text.

Intentional changes are extremely few, and there is not even one that perverts Christian doctrine or practice.

Are the Variations Serious?

When we realize how many variations have been discovered we might think it is a very serious matter, but such is not the case. However, some critics of the Bible have tried to make it appear that the Bible has been so corrupted that it is not reliable, but they are entirely wrong.

There are indeed a large number of variations. There are about 200,000 in the thousands of hand written Greek manuscripts. Only a small part of the whole New Testament is involved, and most of the variations are not important. Most of them do not even affect the translation from Greek into another language.

One of the best known corrected Greek texts is the work of two British scholars, B. F. Westcott and F. J. A Hort. A later text, perhaps the one most widely used now, is Nestle's text which differs only slightly from the Westcott and Hort text.

Hort said all the known variations of every kind would make up not more than one eighth of the entire New Testament. He said if we eliminate such errors as misspelled and transposed words, errors which do not change the meaning at all, there would remain only about one-sixtieth of the whole affected. He added that most of these errors do not change the meaning in any significant way, and the ones that do would constitute not more than

one-thousandth part of the New Testament.¹

The chief contribution textual criticism has made is not in correcting a corrupt text but rather in showing that the text had not been corrupted in a serious way through all the centuries and thousands of copies. This indicates that God has been watching over His word so that the gospel, the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), would be preserved for people of every generation. We can confidently trust the New Testament as we have it to be essentially in its pure original form.

Textual correction has been done on the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. The order of the scribes, established by Ezra, had as their task the preservation of the scriptures. They purified the text as far as they could with the manuscripts that were available and preserved it with the most meticulous care.

Lesson Four

The Resurrection of Jesus

Christian faith is in a risen and living Savior. All information about Jesus' resurrection comes from the scriptures, and the scriptures are reliable. In this lesson let us first recall briefly what the New Testament tells about the resurrection of Jesus.

The Bible Account of Jesus' Resurrection

To make sure Jesus was dead, a soldier thrust a spear into His side as He hung lifeless on the cross. Before Pilate, the Roman governor, would give up His body he called the centurion in charge of the crucifixion and confirmed that Jesus was dead. The body was laid in the new tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and the opening was closed by a large stone. The chief priests and Pharisees remembered that Jesus had said He would rise in three days. Therefore they asked Pilate to make the tomb secure until after the third day to prevent His disciples from stealing the body and claiming that He had risen. Pilate granted them a guard and told them to make the tomb as secure as they could. The tomb was sealed and the guard stationed.

Early in the morning on the third day, a group of women brought spices to put on Jesus' body. Before the women arrived an angel came and rolled away the stone. The soldiers were so frightened that they became like dead men, and Jesus came from the tomb alive. A short time later Jesus appeared

¹ F. J. A. Hort, *Introduction to the New Testament in the Original Greek* (New York: Harper, 1882), 2.

to Mary Magdalene and then to the other women. Some time during the day He appeared to Peter and later in the day to two disciples as they walked to the nearby town of Emmaus. On the evening of the resurrection day Jesus appeared to all the apostles except Thomas. One week later He appeared to them all, including Thomas. There were other appearances later. A partial list of appearances is given in the fifteenth chapter of First Corinthians.

Explanations by Unbelievers

Those who do not believe Jesus was raised offer various explanations of how the disciples came to believe He was raised. A few have suggested that Jesus did not really die but revived in the tomb- But Jesus had been cruelly beaten and nailed to a cross where He hung for about six hours. Then He received a spear wound in the side and showed no sign of life. It is unreasonable to think He could have revived. He would have had to move away a stone so heavy that a whole group of women knew they could not move it without help. Even if He could muster that kind of strength He would still have had the problem of getting past the guard. He would have had to appear to His disciples in such strength and vigor, even after all He had experienced, as to convince them that He had been raised in power over death.

Some say that Jesus' disciples stole His body out of the tomb and claimed He had risen. The stone, the seal, and the guard were for the very purpose of preventing that. Even If they had been able to overcome these obstacles and steal His body they would have known He did not arise. Then how could their boldness be accounted for when they had been so afraid that they had hidden themselves for fear of those who killed Jesus? After they saw Jesus alive, were with Him for forty days, and the Holy Spirit descended upon them, they did not hesitate to stand before those very rulers they had so feared and boldly declare that Jesus was alive. They endured severe persecution the rest of their lives for preaching the resurrection of Jesus. It is unthinkable that they would have endured such persecution for something they knew was not true.

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus cannot be explained by supposing that the disciples invented the story. If they had done that, no one would have seen Jesus alive, and the whole story of so many seeing Him would have been false. In that case it would have been impossible to successfully perpetrate such a fraud with so many people falsely claiming to have seen Him. A number of people might agree to promote a falsehood if they were of low moral character and stood to gain some material benefit by it. But the very opposite was true of the apostles. Without doubt the apostles believed Jesus arose.

Others think the apostles thought they saw Jesus but were mistaken. The dead body still in the tomb would have prevented that error. The Bible account of the events show the impossibility of their being honestly mistaken about seeing Him. Marcus Dods well showed the absurdity of such a supposition:

This supposition, therefore, that the disciples were prepared to believe in the resurrection and wished to believe it, and what they wished to see they thought they saw, must be given up... and the idea that they actually were in this expectant state of mind is thoroughly contradicted by the narrative. So far from being so hopeful, they were sad and gloomy... they thought all was over. The women who went with their spices to anoint the dead—they certainly were not expecting to find their Lord risen. The men to whom they announced what they had seen were skeptical; some of them laughed at the women, and called their report “idle tales,” and would not believe. Thomas, with all the resolute distrust of others which a modern skeptic could show, vows he will believe such a wild imagination on no man’s word, and unless he sees the Lord with his own eyes and is allowed to test the reality of the figure by touch as well, he will not be convinced.

In short, there was no one person to whom our Lord appeared who was not taken wholly by surprise. ... We are compelled, therefore, to dismiss the idea that the first disciples believed in the resurrection because they wished to do so and were prepared to do so.¹

The Church and the Resurrection of Jesus

One strong reason for believing that Jesus arose is the fact that the church sprang suddenly into existence, three thousand strong in one day, and continued to expand rapidly.

The apostles, from utter defeat, fear, and hopelessness, suddenly possessed a faith that enabled them to defy all opposition from those of whom they had been terrified. Their testimony of what they had seen was so compelling that thousands were convinced beyond doubt, accepted Jesus as “Lord and Christ,” and the church existed with a vitality absolutely undaunted. They knew Jesus was alive from the dead. That alone could account for such a phenomenon. How real and how present Jesus was to those apostles and first Christians! They were bold before their accusers because they knew that nothing in this world, and nothing that could happen to them, could defeat the purpose of the living Savior! They were in living union with the living Christ! We believe in the same Savior, because we too believe He came forth alive from the tomb. We can live in the Joy of His fellowship and the hope of

sharing His glory.

SCRIPTURES

In the Garden

Matthew 26:36-56; Mark 14:32-52; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-12.

The Trial and Crucifixion

Matthew 26:57 to 27:66; Mark 14:53 to 15:47; Luke 22:54 to 23:56; John 18:12 to 19:42.

From the Resurrection to the Ascension

Matthew 28:1-20; Mark 16:1-20; Luke 23:56 to 24:52; John 20:1 to 21:25.

NOTES

Marcus Dods, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, a volume in *The Expositor's Bible*, editor W. R Nicoll (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1889), pages 349-350.

Lesson Five **How God Gave Us the Bible**

Divisions of the Bible

The Bible is divided into two main sections, the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are thirty-nine divisions or books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven in the New Testament.

The Old Testament contains the law of Moses and other writings directed to the people of Israel. The law of Moses was the law of the covenant which God made with Israel when He brought them out of slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses. That covenant was binding until the new covenant, the covenant of Christ, became effective. The writings of the New Testament are the scriptures of the new covenant and express God's will to all who follow Christ.

The Old Testament was written by prophets who were inspired by the Spirit of God: "For the prophecy came not by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:21). But God speaks to us now through His Son Jesus Christ: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake In time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (Hebrews 1:1-2).

We need a knowledge of the Old Testament in order to understand some things in the New Testament, but it is to the New Testament that we

must go to learn the way of salvation and the will of God for the Christian.

Truth Is Through Jesus

Jesus came into the world as the living Word of God (John 1:1-14). Therefore all the teaching of Jesus is the teaching of God. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). He also said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). Again He said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63). A person must know the truth Jesus gave in order to become free from sin and have spiritual life, but, so far as we know. He left no writings. What provision did He make for giving His teachings to the world?

His Truth Was Given Through His Apostles

When Jesus left the world He left the task of teaching His truth in the hands of His disciples. He commissioned His apostles to proclaim His teachings throughout the world: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying. All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:18-20). This work was not limited to His apostles because He promised to be with them in carrying it out until the end of the world. Therefore the preaching of the gospel of Christ continued after the death of the apostles and will continue until the end of the world.

The Power of the Holy Spirit

Here a difficulty might seem to appear. How could the apostles, subject to the Imperfections common to men, teach what they had heard from Jesus without making errors? God could not permit errors in giving the truth that is necessary to make people free from sin. This apparent obstacle was not really an obstacle, because God gave a special power to them by the Holy Spirit. His promise was given in these words of Jesus, "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26). The Spirit would also give them truth that Jesus had not taught them when He was in the flesh. See John 14:15-17; 16:12-15; Acts 1:8.

When Jesus was ready to ascend to heaven He told His apostles to wait in Jerusalem until the Spirit came upon them (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4-8). In

the second chapter of Acts we read of the Spirit coming upon them. Then they began to speak “as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:1-4). From that time they taught by that power. Therefore their teaching was the word of God just as the teaching of Jesus had been when He was in the flesh with them. In fact it was Jesus doing the teaching through them. In promising the Spirit He had said, “... he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:15). It is recommended that all of chapters 14, 15, and 16 of John be read In this connection.

The New Testament Scriptures

The power the Spirit gave to teach by divine inspiration was called the gift of prophecy, and those who had this gift were prophets. The work of proclaiming the gospel throughout the world was too great a task for the apostles alone. Therefore certain others were given the gift of prophecy. Thus Christians are “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20).

How the Teaching Was Confirmed

The next question that arises is, “How would the people know that the teaching of the apostles and prophets came from God and not from the speakers’ own minds?” The proof of that would have to be given by God. and it would have to be a kind of proof people could not duplicate by their own power. People were convinced that the teaching of Jesus was true by the miracles He did. He said, “... the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me” (John 10:25). Nicodemus came to Jesus and said, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2).

The teaching of Jesus through the apostles and prophets was also confirmed by miraculous signs. The same Spirit who gave them the power to teach also gave them power to confirm the teaching. In Hebrews 2:3-4 we see the plan of God for giving us His word: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will.”

Upon one occasion, when Peter and John had been ordered by the Jewish authorities not to teach any more in the name of Jesus, a group of disciples of-

ferred a prayer. They said, “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30). This Indicates that the signs went along with the teaching as God’s proof that the teaching was from Him.

Lesson Six

Sufficiency of the Scriptures

There would have been no way for anyone to know the things of God if He had not revealed them. No matter how wise a person is, he cannot, by his own wisdom and learning, search and find the perfect truth of God without God’s revelation, and the scriptures are the only source of that revelation. Christ gave this revelation by inspiration of the Spirit through His apostles and other prophets. Paul describes this process, using the illustration of one person not being able to know what is in the mind of another unless the other reveals it: “For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:11-13). An alternate rendering for the latter part of verse thirteen is given in the margin of the RSV as follows: “Interpreting spiritual truths in spiritual language.” They were not left to their own wisdom in giving God’s truth.

Our Only Guide

Not only is the Bible a source of God’s will to us; it is the only source. We cannot learn of God’s saving grace and our duty toward Him except from the scriptures. There is a great need for this fact to be realized, because people depend on other things Instead of the Bible, or in addition to the Bible. Some depend on the decrees of councils, synods, or other governing bodies. Others trust in an “inner voice” which they take to be a direct revelation of God. Of course, there is a high probability that the “inner voice” will finally tell them what they want to hear. The Bible was given from God to protect us from that very kind of self-deception. Many do not ask what the Bible teaches but only what their religious group teaches, assuming that it surely teaches the truth. We are thankful that God has given His sure word in the scriptures.

Let us use it for the purpose He intended. The scriptures are sufficient, to guide us in all our religious faith and practice.

The Purpose of the Scriptures

The following passage shows the purpose of the inspired scriptures: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works* (2 Timothy 3:16-17). From this we can see that there is not one point of doctrine or instruction in religion we need that is not given or authorized by the scriptures. Let us have faith in God to believe that the scriptures which He gave are sufficient to serve the purpose for which they were given. Let us accept the authority of God and not “the authority of men.” If we undertake to follow the scriptures only, what place could there be for the creeds of men? Acceptance of the scriptures as the only and sufficient guide is a basic principle and is the protection against errors that may arise.

Lesson Seven

Authority in Christianity

The Necessity of Authority

The subject of authority was introduced in lesson six and is continued in this lesson. Authority is defined as. “Legal or rightful power; a right to command or to act.” In all life’s activities, including religion, authority is needed. All religions recognize authority, but not all recognize the same authority.

In Christianity there is only one rightful authority. Practically all who profess Christianity regard the Bible as an authority, but many accept some other authority also. Some believe the church has authority to give doctrines in addition to the Bible teaching. Others believe that some book of later revelation is authoritative along with the Bible. Such supposed “revelations” are not rightly authoritative in Christianity. and neither are creeds or any other writings of men.

The Scriptures Are Sufficient

Why would we need an authority in addition to the Bible? As was shown in the last lesson. God gave the scriptures to equip us completely for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Therefore any work not supplied by the scriptures cannot be a good work. Faith in God’s wisdom and power causes us

to believe that the scriptures He gave are able to serve the purpose for which He gave them.

Proper Christian Authority Is in Christ

God, the Father, has supreme authority, and He gave all authority to His Son Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:18). Jesus, in turn, gave authority to His apostles to teach the truth of God by which sinners are made free. Jesus guided them in their teaching by the Holy Spirit, confirming their words by miraculous signs. The apostles and prophets gave this divine teaching to guide us in faith and practice. They gave the teaching in permanent form in the New Testament Scriptures.

No one can improve on the work of God. In the book of Revelation, the last book in the Bible, is this warning: “For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).

This warning is given here in regard to the book of Revelation, but it can be properly given concerning any part of the word of God, but not in regard to anything given by uninspired men.

Commandments of Men

Adding to the word of God is not a new practice. The elders of the Jews added many requirements to the law of God. In the fifteenth chapter of Matthew we learn that Jesus did not accept those additions. He said the words of Isaiah against the people of his time applied also to those of Jesus’ time: “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men’ (Matthew 15:7-9). This should be enough to warn us against following the teachings of men.

The Bible is the very word of God and is therefore truth. It is fixed and unchangeable, and its teachings are not contradictory. If the creeds of men taught just what the Bible teaches they would all teach the same things without contradiction. Is this the case? No, in one or more points the creeds all differ, and sometimes they are changed to fit the changing views of the people. This shows that the creeds of men differ from the Bible.

Jesus would not risk even His apostles to teach His truth by their own wisdom, but commanded them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came to guide them. Why will men today, by their own wisdom, formulate doctrine for people in religion? We have the words of the Spirit of God, the perfect teaching. Let us follow that teaching in faith.

Changing the Gospel Is Sinful

The gospel is given in the New Testament scriptures, but people disagree even on some of the terms of the gospel. Paul gave a very serious warning about this: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again. If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8-9). God gave us the gospel, the good news, concerning Christ and salvation and how that salvation is received. How careful we should be not to set aside or change any part of it.

The Problem of Human Imperfections

We all share human imperfection. We are not perfect in wisdom, understanding, faith, love or anything else. As long as we are in this world there will be room for growth in faith, love, and knowledge of God’s will. That might cause some to think we need an official interpretation of the scriptures by an authoritative interpreter like a synod or council. But the imperfection of all men is a reason we should not accept such an official interpreter. Such an interpreter, whether one person or many, is necessarily imperfect just as all people are. To follow their interpretations or teachings would be to follow men instead of the Lord. That would be following the wrong authority, even when their interpretations happened to be correct.

This does not mean that careful students of the Bible cannot help others understand it, but their word should not be accepted as authority. They should direct people to the Bible to help them understand it, but what we believe should be the result of our understanding of what we find in the Bible for ourselves.

If we accept some teaching as authoritative we accept whatever imperfections it may have. The reason we can accept the word of God as authority is because it came from God and therefore doesn’t have any imperfections. It is right to follow God, and Jesus emphatically said it is wrong to follow men.

If we accept the word of God as He gave it in the scriptures, seeking to know all we can of His will and following it with all our heart, letting it correct and guide us in all things, we will still make mistakes, but we will be accepting

the right authority: our faith will be properly placed. We will need forgiveness all along the way, and the God of all grace will grant it because our faith is in Him.

God did not give His word to only a select few who were capable of perfectly understanding it, but He gave it to all who are willing to follow Him. Therefore we will be able to understand what we must know to be forgiven of our sins and live as God wants us to live.

Lesson Eight

Simplicity in Christianity

In the preceding lessons it was shown that God has revealed His will to us in the Bible, and that it is wrong to follow any other authority in religious faith and practice. If a person resolves to accept the Bible as his only authority he will see his duty in a clearer light and escape the confusion of many conflicting teachings.

Is the Bible a Mystery?

Many have concluded that the Bible is too great a mystery for them to understand. This has caused them either to make no effort to follow God or to place their confidence in some man or group of men to tell them what to believe and do.

It is true that there are things in the Bible that are difficult to understand, and that probably no one understands everything in the Bible. However, that does not mean the things we must understand to be saved from sin and serve God are hard to understand.

A mystery is something that cannot be understood with the information available. It is not necessarily something that cannot be known with additional information. There are many things in the Old Testament that were mysteries to the people who lived before Christ but are now understood in the light of the New Testament. Through the prophets in the Old Testament, God foretold His work in Christ for salvation, but the prophets did not understand how it would be accomplished. Even angels desired to look into those things (1 Peter 1:10-12).

In the New Testament we read of “the mystery of His will,” “the mystery of Christ,” “the mystery of the gospel,” and “the mystery of the faith.” The work of God in Christ was a mystery. The acceptance of the Gentiles into God’s family was a mystery. These things are no longer mysteries. Paul said, “... by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore

in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Ephesians 3:3-5). For a fuller study of this matter, please read the following scriptures with their contexts: 1 Corinthians 2:6-13; Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:1-10; 6:18-20; Colossians 4:2-3; 1 Timothy 3:9.

There are still things that are mysteries to us. For example, we do not understand how Jesus was both human and divine, but we believe He was. He was divine because He was begotten by the Spirit of God (Luke 1:35). He was human because He was born of a human mother, but how that could be is a mystery. We cannot know more about it than God has revealed. That is all we need to know. This principle has always been true. Moses said to Israel, “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

God’s Requirements Are Plain

The important thing to remember is that mysteries In the Bible are, for the most part, in connection with the working of God. We cannot hope to understand all about His nature and His working, but everything the Bible tells us about what He requires of us is easily understood. No doubt, it was a great mystery to Noah as to how God would bring the flood of water on the earth, but he believed what God said about it and understood what God told him to do. His faith was strong enough to cause him to obey, and he and those with him were saved. It was not necessary to understand the mystery connected with it. The same is true in regard to our faith and obedience to receive the favor and blessings of God.

For “Whosoever Will”

In the first lesson of this series we saw that one must have a knowledge of the Lord to be saved (Isaiah 53:11; 2 Peter 2:20; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). We also saw that Christ died for all who will receive Him. Therefore the essential truth can be understood by us.

The salvation of the Lord Is for “whosoever will” because His invitation is to all: “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” (Matthew 11:28-30). Almost the last words of the

Bible extend a universal invitation: “And the Spirit and the bride say. Come. And let him that heareth say. Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:17).

God does not want any one lost, but He wants all to come to a knowledge of the truth and repent so they will not be lost: “... God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved. and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3-4); “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” (2 Peter 3:9). The desire of God for the salvation of everyone and His promise to save all who come to Him is one of the most soul-stirring teachings in the Bible.

To what conclusion do these truths bring us? Since we must have knowledge of God to be saved, and salvation is for “whosoever will,” we must conclude that “whosoever will” can understand the Bible teaching that He must know to be saved and live pleasing to God.

“Fools Shall Not Err”

In speaking of the way of righteousness and salvation that was to come, Isaiah called it “the way of holiness,” and said, “...the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isaiah 35:8). “Fools” in this passage does not mean what we ordinarily mean by the word. It means a simple ordinary person in contrast to one who is wise in the eyes of the world. Paul describes such a person, foolish in the eyes of the world but wise in the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:18-31).

The plain teachings of the Bible should concern us more than those things which remain a mystery to us. At the same time, we should study the scriptures to know more and more that we might grow toward “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

We can trust God to do everything He promises, whether we understand how or not.

Lesson Nine

Two Ways and Two Destinies

The Bible sets two ways before us. They are opposed to each other, and our eternal destiny depends upon which we choose to travel.

Jesus tells of these two ways: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way. that leadeth to destruction, and many there be

which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13-14). This should impress us with the importance of learning and choosing the way that leads to eternal life.

The Ways Defined

What are the two ways? Simply stated, the narrow way is the way of God and the broad way is the way of man. There are many paths one may take along the broad way. One path is the immoral life, abandonment to the evil impulses of the flesh. But that is not the only path in the broad way. It is possible to be very religious and be in the broad way. Many people in the world are religious but worship false gods. The religious leaders who opposed Jesus offered their worship to the true God, but they were in the broad way.

Repeatedly Jesus said to them. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” (Matthew, chapter 23).

It is even possible to wear the name “Christian” and be in the broad way. Hypocrites can be found among those who say they are Christians, Just as there were hypocrites among the Jews of Jesus’ day. Paul warned that men would arise in the church and teach perverse things (things contrary to the right) and draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:30). Conflicting teachings have brought about many divisions, just as Paul foretold. That is another path in the broad way.

Sincerity Does Not Make the Broad Way Right

Many deceivers are sincere because they are deceived themselves (2 Timothy 3:13). Sincerity does not make the wrong way right. Jesus said If a blind person leads another who is blind they will both fall Into the ditch (Matthew 15:14). Saul of Tarsus, who became the apostle Paul, was a persecutor of Christians before becoming a Christian himself, but he was deeply religious and sincere. Nevertheless, he was surely going in the broad way and later referred to himself as chief of sinners (Acts 23:1; 26:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:12-17). Jesus had foretold that those who would kill His followers would think they were serving God by doing so (John 16:2). Because Saul of Tarsus was sincere Jesus showed mercy on him by appearing to him and telling him he had been persecuting the Christ. Then he could put his trust in Christ and be saved, but while he was an unbeliever he was In the broad way and was not forgiven until he turned to Christ.

The Bible tells us that a way might seem right to a person but be wrong

and result in death: “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Proverbs 14:12). “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2). Therefore all the ways in religion seem right to those who sincerely follow them, but God said to the people of Israel, through the prophet Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). Another prophet wrote, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jeremiah 10:23).

The Jews who rejected the gospel of Christ had a strong zeal for God, but It was misdirected because they did not have faith in Christ and, for that reason, needed to be saved. Concerning them, Paul said, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge” (Romans 10:1-2).

Finding the Narrow Way

In the light of the scriptures that have been noted In this lesson, some might say, “How can one ever be sure he is walking in the narrow way?” God has given us a guide for the way, the scriptures, and we can follow that guide. But if a person can believe he is doing just that and still be in the broad way, how can we be sure?

As we have noted in previous lessons, in spite of the difficulty in understanding parts of the Bible, we may expect to find that part easily understood that we must know to become children of God and live to please Him, if we open our hearts to what we find in His word.

A person might simply decide to become a member of some religious group and Just accept what that group teaches. That is following the wrong authority. We should test everything we hear by what we ourselves find in the Bible. Remember that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Even if a person cannot read he can have someone read the Bible to him. Our faith must be our own and not that of someone else.

Everything God’s word teaches is important for the purpose for which it was given. The more we learn of God’s truth the greater blessing we will be able to receive. After a person becomes a child of God. through obedience to the simple gospel of Christ, he will want to learn all he can of the truth God has given and follow what he learns with his whole heart. That is the narrow

way, the way of faith, forgiveness, righteousness, love, service, hope, and glory.

Divisions of the New Testament

It is helpful to recognize the different parts of the New Testament and the purpose served by each part. The first four books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) tell about Jesus when He was here in the flesh. They tell of His teachings. His mighty works. His death, and His resurrection. The purpose of these books is to give us the information we need to bring us to faith in Him as the Son of God.

In the last chapter of each of the first three books we are told of the commission Jesus gave to His disciples to proclaim the gospel throughout the world. He told them what commands they should give and what blessings they should offer in preaching the gospel.

The book of Acts gives a partial account of the activities of some of the disciples as they carried out the commission Jesus had given them. In that book we see that the disciples preached exactly what Jesus had told them to preach. We also see how people received their word and what they did to be forgiven and become children of God.

Of course, the gospel is the same now as then, and people become Christians the same way they became Christians then.

The rest of the New Testament books, except the last, are epistles or letters written to churches and individuals by the Inspired apostles and prophets, giving instructions about how the churches and individual Christians are to serve God.

The last book (Revelation) is a message of Christ, given through the apostle John, to seven churches in Asia Minor (the Roman province of Asia). There is a short message to each of the seven churches, and the rest of the book is a series of visions given to John. It tells of things to come to pass and offers encouragement to those Christians and all future Christians to remain faithful to Christ, assuring them of final victory In Christ in spite of fierce opposition by the forces of evil.

Lesson Ten **The Saving Principle**

What is the principle upon which the sinner is saved? No one can be saved upon the principle of his own merit or righteousness. The sinner cannot earn salvation. By reading the fourth chapter of Romans, the second chapter of Ephesians, and other passages, we see that salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned. It is by God's favor or grace.

Grace Is the Saving Principle

All responsible people have sinned and, for that reason, deserve to be lost. In spite of that, God loves us and sent Christ to save us. That is grace. Grace is unmerited favor. God's grace is extended to us through Jesus Christ who died to make expiation or atonement for sin. This forgiveness by God's grace is given to those who have faith in God and Christ. Salvation is by God's grace, and it is by faith that we have access into His grace (Romans 5:1-2). Some scriptures showing this are as follows: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men ..." (Romans 1:18).

"But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God" (Romans 3:21-25).

"Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2).

The Source of Faith

The source of true faith is the word of God. Paul wrote, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). Our only source of the word about Christ is the Scriptures.

This same truth is set forth by Jesus in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). Jesus said, "The seed is the word of God" (Luke 8:11). In the parable, when the seed was sown it fell into different kinds of soil, representing different kinds of hearers. Only that which fell in good soil brought forth fruit. Jesus described the good soil: "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience" (Luke 8:15).

All the good fruit in the life of the Christian is the result of the seed, the word of Christ, growing in an honest and good heart. Any other seed, if it produces fruit, will produce the wrong fruit. The only seed God plants is His word, and Jesus said, "Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up" (Matthew 15:13).

Faith Described and Illustrated

The faith that gives access into the grace of God is more than Just believing the facts about Jesus. “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him: but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43). That kind of faith will not save. We need to know all we can about the faith that pleases God.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews is devoted to the subject of faith. In that chapter faith is described, the necessity of it is stressed, and a number of examples are given showing how people received various blessings from God by faith. All the examples should be studied, but we shall here consider two of them.

Noah

“By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Hebrews 11:7).

The Old Testament account of Noah’s deliverance by faith is in the sixth, seventh, and eighth chapters of Genesis. God told Noah that He was going to destroy life from the earth by a flood, and Noah believed Him. God told him to build an ark, giving him detailed instructions, for the saving of himself and his family. Noah did Just as God told him and he, his family, and all the animals God told him to take with him were saved from drowning. In the Genesis account notice how often It states that Noah did according to all that God commanded him.

Noah had to do what God told him to do to be saved from the flood. Does that mean he was saved by works? We might think so if God had not said, in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, that it was by faith that he built the ark for the saving of his household. He believed what God said, put his trust in Him for His promise, and obeyed His command. God gives this as an example to show us what the faith is like which brings the blessings of God.

The Walls of Jericho

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days” (Hebrews 11:30). The Old Testament record of that is in the sixth chapter of Joshua. The children of Israel had come to take the city of Jericho which was protected by a great wall. “And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I

have given into thine hand Jericho ..." (Joshua 6:2). Being God's gift, it was by His grace, but He commanded Joshua and the Israelites to do something before taking possession of it. He told him to have the Israelites march around the walls every day for six days and seven times on the seventh day. There were also some other details in the instructions. God promised the walls would fall when the people obeyed. Some might think they took the city by their works, but God said, in the book of Hebrews, that the walls fell by faith.

The Israelites had faith enough to believe God could and would do what He promised. They also had faith enough to believe He meant what He said when He gave some conditions to be met before receiving the city which God had given them. They obeyed and the walls fell by faith—after they obeyed God.

Why did God give this example and the others when He wanted to show us what true faith is like? Obviously it was because we must have the same kind of faith they had. When God promises a blessing, and gives conditions to be met to receive the promised blessing, the blessing is received when God's commands are obeyed. When the blessing is received that way it is received by faith. Faith takes God at His word and yields to Him in trusting obedience.

Christian Faith

The nature of faith has never changed. The old covenant which the Israelites were under has ended and we are now under the new covenant, but the nature of faith is the same under any covenant. This is shown to be true by the fact that when God wanted to show new-covenant people the nature of faith He used old-covenant examples to show it. In spite of this, many people say that if we have to do anything to receive salvation except to believe it would be by works and not by faith. These examples in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews show this idea to be wrong. After all, believing and repenting are things we do, but they are necessary. If what a person does is by his own design it brings no benefit, but If it is In obedience to a command of God it is an act of faith.

When God gives a promise we can accept it in complete confidence. If God gives a command or commands to be obeyed in order to receive that particular promise, we cannot receive it until we obey in trusting faith. Faith believes God and obeys whatever God commands with the confident hope of receiving whatever He promises. That is the very nature of faith.

SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READINGS

Fifth chapter of Romans and 1 Timothy 1:8-10

Lesson Eleven

Obedience

In these lessons it has been shown that the Bible teaches that saving faith is faith that causes one to obey God. Since salvation from sin is by faith, it is proper to ask whether or not God makes requirements of us to receive salvation, and, if so, what the requirements are.

Obedience of Christ and Men

Jesus was obedient to God the Father, “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). By that act of obedience He brought salvation to us, and He saves those who obey Him. Concerning Christ we read, “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered: and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:8-9). Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me. Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

Only those who obey Christ will receive salvation, because those who do not obey will receive vengeance: “. . . when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). This shows there are commandments in the gospel of our Lord Jesus, because obedience is doing what is commanded. Does that mean salvation is by works instead of faith? No! It is by faith that obedience is rendered. In Romans 16:26 Paul speaks of the “obedience of faith.” It is not obedience of merit but of faith, but it is obedience nevertheless. Obedience with the idea of earning salvation would not bring God’s gift of eternal life.

The Extent of Obedience

To what extent must one obey the will of God? Of course, due to the imperfection of the flesh, we will need the forgiving grace of God for our failures until the end of this life, but we must be committed to obeying God completely—not partially. That must be our desire and effort.

Peter quoted a prophecy from Moses (Deuteronomy 18:15-19) which foretold the coming of Jesus and stated the necessity of obeying Him in everything: “For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me: him shall ye hear

in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:22-23).

If something in the word of Christ does not please us or seem right to us, and if we undertake to obey only what pleases us or appeals to our human wisdom, we will not be acting by faith in Christ. Many do not understand this. One was heard to say she did not go to worship but made up for it by giving. Apparently she thought of salvation as a works salvation and thought if she did enough good works it would excuse her for not trying to do all the will of God. But salvation is by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). If we have faith in God we believe all He says and accept His total will as the guide for our lives. The person of faith is committed to obeying the Lord in everything, not to earn or merit salvation, but because Christ is the Lord of his life.

“What Shall I Do, Lord?”

Faith asks, “What shall I do. Lord?” It never asks, “Is it necessary to do it?” This question, “What shall I do. Lord?” was asked sincerely by a man who had just learned that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. The man was Saul of Tarsus, and the account of his conversion is found in three places: Acts, chapters 9, 22, and 26. All three accounts should be read to get the complete story. We shall here relate events from the combined accounts.

Saul was on the way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there when, at mid-day, a light from heaven—brighter than the sun—shone upon him, and he saw Jesus in heaven. Jesus said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Saul asked, “Who art thou. Lord?” Jesus replied, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest.”

Saul realized he had been opposing God and the Christ, and he cried out, “What shall I do. Lord?” His new-found faith caused him to repent immediately and change the course of his life.

Saul’s question is the vital one for every one. When Jesus was talking to him He told him some things he would have to do and suffer in the service of the gospel, but He did not personally tell him what he must do to be forgiven. Rather, He told him to go into the city and promised that someone there would tell him what he must do (Acts 9:6). For three days Saul waited and prayed, blind from the light he had seen. Then the Lord sent a disciple named Ananias to Saul. Ananias restored Saul’s sight and told him some of the same things Jesus had already told him about his service in preaching Christ. Then he said, “And now why tamest thou? arise, and be baptized, and

wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). That is the only thing Ananias told him that Jesus had not already told him. Therefore that was what Jesus had reference to when He said some one would tell him what he must do.

Of course it was necessary for Saul to believe in Christ and repent of his sins. It was not necessary for Ananias to tell him to do that because he already believed with his whole heart and had repented so deeply that he neither ate nor drank for three days while he prayed and waited to learn what he must do. He obeyed and his sins were washed away, not by the cleansing power of water but by the power of God who forgave him when he obeyed by faith.

Salvation was purchased for us by Jesus, by His blood which was shed on the cross, and we lay hold upon it by faith. The gospel requirements are the same for us as they were for Saul. The Lord Is the same. His promise is the same, and His requirements are the same now as then.

Seek the Whole Truth

To learn the truth on the subject of salvation, or any other subject, we must study all that the Bible says on the subject. For example, one could not learn from Acts 16:31 all that is required to be saved, because that verse only mentions believing on Christ. It would be a serious mistake to conclude that repentance is not necessary just because it is not mentioned in that verse. When we read all the Bible says on the subject of faith we understand that believing on Christ in the true sense involves accepting all He says and yielding our wills to His will in obedience, but we would not learn that from this one verse.

Let us take a closer look at Acts 16:31 in its context. Paul and Silas were in prison and were singing and praying at midnight. An earthquake shook the prison, the doors came open, and the bonds were loosed from all the prisoners. The jailor was awakened and, thinking the prisoners had escaped, was about to kill himself when Paul called to him and assured him that they were all there. Then the jailor, trembling with fear, cried, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Their answer was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (verse 31). But they could not believe until they heard the word of the Lord, so the next verse says that Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord to them. Then verse 33 declares, “And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his straightway.”

The gospel of Christ has facts to be believed by faith, commands to be obeyed by faith, and promises to be received by faith.

Lesson Twelve

Repentance

“And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). When Jesus told His disciples to preach the gospel throughout the world He said, “Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached In his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47). Many other scriptures show the necessity of repenting in order to be forgiven.

The Scriptures abundantly show the willingness of God to forgive those who repent. This is indicated in the parable of the prodigal son by the eagerness and joy with which the father received his son upon his return home (Luke 15:11-32). Jesus was eager for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Many who demanded the death of Jesus came to believe in Him and were sorry for what they had done. In response to their question as to what they should do, Peter told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus and promised them forgiveness (Acts, chapter two).

What Is Repentance?

Repentance is not just being sorry. The right kind of sorrow will cause one to repent, but sorrow itself is not repentance: “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Corinthians 7:10). If a person is sorry just because he is suffering for his sins he has worldly sorrow. He can have that kind of sorrow and be bitter and resentful instead of penitent. But if a sinner comes to have faith in God he will love God because of God’s love for him. Then he will love what he knows God loves and hate what he knows God hates. He will be sorry for his sins because sin keeps him from the favor of God and will cause him to be lost if not forgiven. He longs for God’s forgiveness. That is godly sorrow or sorrow toward God. and it causes him to repent. The goodness of God leads to repentance (Romans 2:4). Sometimes, when a person becomes a Christian, his motive is fear of being lost more than love for God, but love is there and as he grows in Christ the love motive becomes stronger and stronger.

Repentance is not just reformation. Repentance causes one to reform or change his way of living, but there can be reformation without repentance. One might change his conduct because he decides it will improve his station in life. He can reform that way even if he does not believe in God, but it would not be the repentance that leads to salvation.

Then what is repentance? Repentance is a change of the will due to the realization of one's lost condition and the desire to be right with God. It is the determination, properly motivated, to turn from sin and live according to the will of God.

The Difficulty

The greatest difficulty in obeying the gospel is not in understanding what is required, but in repenting. That is because it is not easy to surrender the human will in submission to the will of God.

Many find it difficult to repent because they love the pleasures of sin and are not willing to give up the sinful practices in their lives. That unwillingness can be broken down when the love of God is seen.

For others it is difficult to repent because they want the approval of the world. This was true in the time of Jesus' public ministry just as it is now: "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42-43). When a person deeply repents he is resolved to do the will of God, no matter what others say or do.

When Saul of Tarsus, on the road to Damascus, saw Jesus and later learned what he must do to complete his obedience and be forgiven, he obeyed at once. Long afterward he said, "... I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me" (Acts 26:19-21). He obeyed without conferring with anyone, regardless of what others might think (Galatians 1:15-17).

Deeds Worthy of Repentance

What kinds of deeds are worthy of repentance? When John the Baptist preached repentance he told his hearers to bear fruit worthy of repentance (Luke 3:8). In the verses following, in answer to the questions of the people, he described some of the works they should do. Righteous living and acts of love are the fruit of repentance. When a person has repented of having sinned he does not want to be a sinner any longer, but he wants to do what is right: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). The

old attitudes, desires, and purposes are put away, and the new attitudes, desires, and purposes are pure and right. That means actions also will be right. The thief becomes honest, the liar becomes truthful, etc.

If a person has been dishonest and repents he will try his best to repay what he gained dishonestly. Some things cannot be undone, but the penitent person will want to make right all the wrong he has done, and will do so as far as he is able. One day Jesus entered into the house of Zacchaeus and brought salvation, “And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord: Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken anything from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold” (Luke 19:8). He had repented and was ready to perform deeds worthy of repentance.

Some people will have a much greater change in conduct than others when they repent because they have lived a more sinful life, but all have sinned and must repent or perish (Luke 13:3,5).

The Christian and Repentance

Repentance involves an attitude of heart that one must have in becoming a Christian, and as long as the Christian maintains that essential attitude he continues to be forgiven, continues in a state of forgiveness, even for sins of which he is not aware. If he yields to temptation and chooses to do what he knows is wrong he has lost that penitent attitude and must repent and turn back to God for forgiveness. God is always willing to forgive.

Complete Repentance

A person cannot repent of some sins and hold on to others and have the favor and blessing of God. When one repents of having been a sinner, he wishes he had never done anything wrong and wants to do right in everything. He seeks to learn all of God’s will and follows it as he learns.

Repentance is necessary in becoming a Christian and continues to be necessary in living the Christian life.

Suggestions for Additional Reading

The prayer of the penitent: Psalm 51. The change of heart: Romans 12:1-2. Contrast between the life of sin and life after repentance: Ephesians 4:17-32; Colossians 3:1-17.

Some works worthy of repentance: Matthew 25:31-36.

Lesson Thirteen

The Command of Baptism

All readers of the Bible know that baptism is a command of the Lord, but not all agree on certain points concerning it. Therefore, though we have already given some attention to baptism, we shall devote this lesson to a further study of the subject.

What Is the Purpose of Baptism?

We shall answer this question, by presenting the passages of scripture that mention baptism in such a way as to indicate its purpose.

The Great Commission of Jesus

After Jesus' resurrection He gave an assignment or commission to His disciples to preach the gospel in all the world. This is recorded in the last chapter of each of the first three books of the New Testament and, in a more condensed form, in John 20:21-23 and Acts 1:8. In Mark, baptism is mentioned in such a way as to show its purpose: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). In the two oldest Greek manuscripts and some others, the book of Mark ends with verse eight of chapter sixteen. That causes some to think the rest of the chapter does not belong in the Bible. Even without this passage in Mark the purpose of baptism is abundantly shown in other passages.

Sometimes someone declares that Mark 16:16 does not teach that believing and being baptized are both necessary to being saved because it does not say, "He that believes not and is not baptized will be condemned." But that would not be necessary. The unbeliever will be condemned, no matter what else he may do or not do. The passage tells who will be lost: it is the one who does not believe. It also tells who will be saved, it is the one who believes and is baptized.

Acts, Chapter Two

In the second chapter of Acts the apostle Peter preached that Jesus was crucified and raised from the dead according to God's promise. Then he called on the people to believe that God had made Him both Lord and Christ (verse 36). The people believed and cried out, asking what to do (verse 37). "Then Peter said unto them. Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of

the Holy Ghost” (verse 38).

Acts 22:16

In lesson eleven we studied the conversion of Saul of Tarsus. It will be remembered that the Lord sent Ananias to Saul to tell him what he must do. He said, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). There is no power in water to wash away sins, but there is power in God to take them away, and He does that for those who obey Him in faith. When Saul obeyed God in baptism his sins were washed away, for that is what was clearly promised by the messenger whom Christ sent.

1 Peter 3:21

Concerning the ark which Noah built by the command of God, we read, ”... wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” (1 Peter 3:20-21).

This Is a plain statement which says baptism saves us. We must not disregard this statement from God’s word but try to understand It. It tells in what way baptism does not save and then tells how it does, but the fact stands that, in some sense, baptism saves us. It is not by any virtue, power, or cleansing quality in the water, “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh.” But how does it save? By being “the answer of a good conscience toward God.” God commanded baptism, promising salvation or forgiveness of sins. When faith moves the penitent sinner to obey the command in view of the promise, he obtains a consciousness of forgiveness because he has faith in the unfailing promise of God. In his obedience he appeals to God for a conscience clear of guilt. It is not through any merit of his own but through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. How could anyone maintain a good conscience who disregards the commands of God?

Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:26-27

“Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Romans 6:3). Christ’s blood was shed in His death, and we are baptized into his death. In His death we have the benefits of His blood.

“For ye are all the children of God by faith In Christ Jesus. For as many of

you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26-27). This is one more passage showing the relationship between faith and baptism.

Since one is baptized into Christ, he is not in Christ before he is baptized. This does not mean that baptism alone saves or that it saves because it is a work of merit, for it isn’t. One must be prepared for baptism. He is prepared if his faith has made his will submissive to God’s will so that he has repented and is ready to obey God in all things. Then when he is baptized he is baptized into Christ. It is all a process of faith.

What Is the Action in Baptism?

In modern usage the word “baptism” is defined as immersion in water and also sprinkling, or pouring water on a person. The definition of a word changes as its usage changes, but to obey Christ in baptism we must know what He meant when He commanded it. From the scriptures, not from a modern English dictionary, we can see what John the Baptist, the apostles, and others did when they baptized under direct divine guidance.

John 3:23, “And John also was baptizing in Aenon near Salim, because there was much water there ...”

Matthew 3:16, “And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water...”

Acts 8:38-39, “... and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water...”

Romans 6:4, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Colossians 2:12, “...buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.”

These scriptures show what action was performed when people were baptized. This is in agreement with the meaning of the Greek word “baptisma” which means to plunge or immerse. It was several centuries before sprinkling and pouring for baptism came into vogue. In the Greek Orthodox Church, where the people have spoken Greek all along, they have always practiced immersion only. The Greek word could not mean anything else to them.

A Striking Contrast

Sprinkling and pouring were substituted for immersion because of con-

venience, not because it was thought that the Bible taught it. This can be seen by referring to the writings of the theologians even in the churches that accept this substitution. It can also be seen by reading any encyclopedia. It is easy to see the contrast between scriptural baptism on the one hand and sprinkling and pouring on the other hand. The scriptures we have examined show that scriptural baptism requires water. Sprinkling and pouring also require water, but that is where the resemblance ends. In scriptural baptism both the one being baptized and the one doing the baptizing went down into the water and came up out of the water after the baptism had taken place. In baptism there was a burial and raising up. Sprinkling and pouring require none of these features. It was the desire to eliminate those very features that led to the adoption of sprinkling and pouring.

Let us seek to obey the Lord in all things.

Lesson Fourteen

Living the New Life

The Christian lives a new life, much different from the life of the one who does not have Christ as Lord of his life: “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:3-4). That shows the point at which the new life begins. Acting by faith, the penitent sinner is baptized into Christ, and “... if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). He is buried by baptism and raised forgiven and ready to live a new life. The sinner is dead in his sins, but when he is forgiven he is made alive (Ephesians 2:1-2; Colossians 2:13).

Born Again

Entrance into the kingdom of Christ is by a spiritual new birth (John 3:5-7). As physical birth opens up an entirely new world and new way of life, so birth into Christ sets one's feet into new paths of living. He has a new relationship with God, new desires, thoughts, aims, and way of living.

The change is represented as putting off the old man, or one's old nature, and becoming a new person: “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Ephesians 4:22-24). Notice that the new person is after the likeness of God, and the

change takes place by the change of mind. That requires knowledge, as shown in Colossians 3:9-10, "... ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him." The forming of the image of God in His children is not completed now but is continuing as the renewed mind increases in knowledge of God and puts into practice what is learned. The Christian sincerely desires to be like God, and the Spirit of God works in him to make him so.

The only source of the necessary knowledge of God is the Bible. We must walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7), and faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Also remember that we cannot grow into the image of God without frequent and earnest prayer.

Must Be Dead to Sin

To see how one must leave the old life of sin and live righteously, read the sixth chapter of Romans. Here are just a few verses from that chapter:

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (verse 6).

"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof (verses 11-12).

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (verse 23).

Continuing in the New Life

The Christian must continue to be faithful to Christ. The apostle Peter gives this strong warning, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning" (2 Peter 2:20). But with the help of God the Christian can overcome by faith: "For whatever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that over cometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5).

A Pure Heart for a Pure Life

A pure heart is necessary for living a pure life. The heart is changed in becoming a child of God. To understand how this comes about we need to know what the heart is. We can discover what it is by observing what its func-

tions are. We can discover this from what the Bible says about the heart.

The Heart Is the Seat of the Emotions

The heart desires, loves, and rejoices: “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Romans 10:1). “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart...” (Mark 12:30). “Therefore did my heart rejoice...” (Acts 2:26).

Functions of the Intellect

Every function of the intellect is attributed to the heart. It thinks, understands, believes, and prompts obedience: “...Why reason ye these things in your hearts?” (Mark 2:8). “...lest at any time they should ... understand with their heart ...” (Matthew 13:15). “For with the heart man believeth ...” (Romans 10:10). “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart,...” (Romans 6:17). “... as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Ephesians 6:6). A person’s heart is not right unless it moves him to obey God.

The Right Kind of Heart

“For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matthew 15:19). The thoughts take place in the heart, and the actions come from the heart. Understanding this, we can see what a change of heart is and how the gospel produces it. We can also see how the changed heart enables the child of God to live the new life. The parable of the sower (Luke 8:4-15) shows that the word of God, as the seed, can produce fruit in only one kind of heart, “an honest and good heart.”

Change of Heart

When a person with a good and honest heart hears the gospel he begins to think about it and reason upon it in his heart. He comes to understand it in his heart and believe it with his heart. This moves him to have sorrow in his heart for having sinned and to repent in his heart and be baptized, obeying from the heart. He rises from his burial in water to live the new life (Romans 6:3-4,17).

Read the second chapter of Acts and see the gospel working just this way in the people’s hearts. When they heard the gospel they believed in their hearts that Jesus was alive and had been made Lord and Christ. Believing this, they were grieved in their hearts and asked what they should do. Peter

told them to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. About three thousand of them “received his word” and were baptized.

They obeyed from the heart and were added to the number of Jesus’ disciples.

When a person becomes a Christian the work of the word in his heart is not finished but has just begun. The word continues to bear fruit in the changed and purified heart, resulting in living the new life in Christ.

Importance of Obedience

Some might make the mistake of thinking it is not important to do the specific things God commands if only the heart is right. That would indicate a misunderstanding of what the heart is and what it means for the heart to be right. One’s heart cannot be right unless he believes the Lord with all his heart and seeks earnestly to know and obey His will in everything.

The heart is purified from sin in obedience: “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (I Peter 1:22).

Purer in heart, O God, help me to be; May I devote my life wholly to Thee;
Watch Thou my wayward feet.

Guide me with counsel sweet; Purer in heart, help me to be.

—Mrs. A. L. Davidson

Lesson Fifteen

Christ and the Church

The church is very prominent in the New Testament, indicating that much attention should be given to the teaching of the Bible about it.

The Church Promised

The first occurrence of the word “church” in the New Testament is in Matthew 16:13-19: “When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said. Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias: and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them. But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him. Blessed art thou,

Simon Bar Jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee. That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” Let us notice several things stated in this passage.

Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

The purpose of keys is to open and shut—to give access to and exclude from. When the gospel was preached, those who obeyed it were admitted into the kingdom of God, and those who rejected it were left out. Jesus gave the promise of the keys to Peter, but He gave the same promise in a different form to all the apostles in John 20:23, “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them: and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Peter was the first to use the keys when he preached on the day of Pentecost. He stated the conditions the Lord had given and promised the forgiveness of sins, and about three thousand obeyed and were forgiven and admitted into the kingdom (Acts, chapter two).

“The Gates of Hell”

The ASV renders this, “the gates of hades”. The RSV translates it, “the powers of death.” Three different Greek words are translated “hell” in the KJV. They do not have the same meaning and, in later translations, are not translated alike. The words are “hades,” “gehenna,” and “tartarus.”

“Hades” means the region of the dead. Everyone goes to hades upon death, but the wicked and righteous are not in the same place in hades. Jesus went to hades (Acts 2:27). But He went to paradise, for He promised the thief on the cross that they would be together there (Luke 23:43). The word “paradise” designates a place of delight.

There are some scriptures that suggest the possibility that those who were in paradise were taken into heaven by Jesus after His resurrection and that, ever since that event, the saved go directly into heaven when they die. A passage relied on for that view is Ephesians 4:8, “Wherefore he saith. When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” In that passage, Paul was quoting from Psalm 68:18. Two other passages that are taken to support this view are 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Philippians 1:23.

“Gehenna” is the final place of punishment. Sometimes the translators

render this word as “hell” and sometimes they just use the Greek word “gehenna” without translating it by an English word.

“Tartarus” is found in only one verse in the Bible, 2 Peter 2:4, and is translated “hell.” There it refers to the place where sinning angels were sent to wait for the final judgment.

Jesus’ promise in Matthew 16:18 assures us that the powers of death, or gates of hades, can neither prevent the Lord from building His church nor destroy it.

This passage also shows the relationship between Christ and His church which He promised to build. He is the foundation, the builder, and the possessor of the church. Therefore there are certain rights which belong to Him alone.

Christ, the Foundation

Jesus said, “On this rock I will build my church.” Even though the name “Peter” means “stone,” it was not upon Peter that the church was built, but upon Christ. Peter had said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Christ is the foundation by virtue of His being the Son of the living God. The name “Peter” is from a Greek word meaning “stone,” but it is a different word from the one used when Jesus said, “On this rock.” The Holy Spirit, through the apostle Paul, said, “For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). A church founded upon a man could not be the church founded upon Jesus.

Christ, the Builder

Jesus’ words, “I will build,” show that Christ was the builder and that the building of the church was future from the time Jesus gave that promise. Since He was the builder. He alone had the right to order the church as He willed, to delegate authority to whom He would, and to reveal His will in any way He wished.

It pleased Jesus to appoint His apostles as His agents and to give His teachings through them and other inspired prophets. One of the spiritual gifts was the gift of prophecy. Those with that gift were prophets with power to deliver the message of God by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The early church was taught directly by the apostles and prophets. Some of them wrote the teaching and all later generations have had opportunity to know it through their writings. That is the purpose of the scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16-17). That teaching is the very word of God (1 Corinthians 14:37).

This explains the statement of Paul in Ephesians 2:19-20, “Now there-

fore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.” Our faith rests on the teaching of Christ through the apostles and prophets. That is the truth of God, and it is wrong to add to that message, to take from it, or change it in any way. There is no place for the creeds of men because we have the word of God.

It is not changing the teaching of the Bible to improve the translation. Some feel that we should use only the KJV, but it is not the first English translation, nor the last.

Christ, the Possessor of the Church

Jesus said, “My church.” He has complete authority over the church. Being possessor of the church. He is its only head.

Speaking of the authority or power which God gave to the risen Christ, Paul said, “... and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). “And he is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18).

What the Church Is

The Scriptures we have observed show that the church is the body of Christ. The Greek word translated “church” literally means “the called out.” So the church is all the people called out of the world to be possessed by God and to serve Him. It is all who have been saved by the blood of Christ. He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). That is the universal church or spiritual body of Christ. A group of Christians in any one place, serving God together, is a church in that place. Some scriptures that refer to local churches are:

Acts 13:1, “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers ...”

Acts 14:23, “And when they had ordained them elders in every church ...”

Romans 16:16, “... The churches of Christ salute you.”

1 Corinthians 1:2, “... unto the church of God which is at Corinth...”

Philippians 1:1, “... to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons ...”

Lesson Sixteen

Can One Be Saved Outside the Church?

It is a generally held opinion that a person can be a Christian, and finally be saved, outside the church. We hear people say, "I am not In the church, but I am trying hard to be a Christian." Is this opinion right? To answer that, we have but to consider what the church is.

The Called Out

The nature of the church is indicated by the meaning of the Greek word translated "church." The word is from two words? "ek," meaning "out of," and "kaleo," meaning "to call." So the basic meaning is, "the called out." It is defined in Thayer's Lexicon as, "A gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly, in the Christian sense, an assembly of Christians gathered for worship." Therefore the church is the called out or separated people.

Many Scriptures show that the Christian has been called out and separated from the world of sin by Christ through His gospel. All who have thus been called out and separated from sin constitute the Lord's called out body of disciples. This is the church of the Lord in the world and is composed of all the saved. One cannot be a Christian without being in Christ's church, for that is what the church is, the called out people. The word "sanctify" means "to set apart." The church is those people who have been sanctified to God.

The Blood-Redeemed

Every Christian has been redeemed by the blood of Jesus. "Redeem" means "to buy back." In salvation a person is purchased by the Lord: "For ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). The price is Christ's blood: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers: but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18-19).

No Christian should ever forget that he was bought by the blood of Christ and belongs to Christ and must, therefore, live for Christ every day. It will help to keep a Christian humble to remember that Christ has done for him what he could never have done for himself. One can lose his soul through sin, and he himself does not have the purchase price for his redemption. Jesus has freely paid the debt for every one who will accept Him on the terms

which He gave. Not only has the blood purchased every Individual Christian, but the Bible also says that His blood has purchased the church. Addressing the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul said, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). The church consists of all the saved. Therefore Christ purchased the church with His blood by purchasing all the members of it, one by one. Every Christian is in the church because he is one of those who make up the blood-bought body of Christ which is the church.

The Body of Christ

We have already noted that the church is the body of Christ. Now your attention is invited to a passage that says Christ is the Savior of the body: “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” (Ephesians 5:23). Since it is His body that He is going to save, all the saved are in His body.

A Sectarian View

The true nature of God’s church, as revealed in the New Testament, is different from the views which many people hold about the church. A mistaken idea is seen in the teaching that one first becomes a Christian, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and, at some later time, he may become a member of the church. Churches (in the sense of denominations) differ from one another in doctrine and practice and wear unblblical names to distinguish them. It is thought by many that it makes no difference which a person chooses to join. There is no Bible teaching that resembles that. Instead, the Bible says, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). From this we see there is only one church as surely as there is only one God.

All, or at least most, will likely agree that one can be a Christian and be saved eternally without belonging to any one of the denominations men have founded. But when a person is saved by the blood of Christ he is in the church the Lord purchased with His blood, the church the New Testament tells us about. This one fact shows that the churches of men, singly or collectively, are not the same as the church revealed in the New Testament, the church of the living God.

The Organized Church

Some will probably agree that what is said here is true concerning the universal spiritual body or church of Christ, but that one does not have to belong to an organized church. We can envision a situation in which a Christian might be, for a time, isolated from other Christians and, for that reason, not be in a worshiping congregation. But if we examine all that the New Testament says about the early Christians we will see that when people received the gospel they were always organized into a worshiping assembly or church. If we follow the Bible we will follow the divine example.

Lesson Seventeen **Christ's Prayer for the Church**

The church or body of Christ consists of all the saved on earth and also all who have gone to be with the Lord. It is the family of God, and part of the family is in heaven and part on earth (Ephesians 3:14-15). Obviously, no sect, denomination, or limited fellowship of churches contains all the members of the church of Christ. "The Lord knoweth them that are his" (2 Timothy 2:19). They are "written in heaven" (Hebrews 12:23). We have also observed that Christ alone has authority over the church, and His authority is expressed through the Scriptures.

The Will of Christ for the Church

The person who has the Spirit of Christ desires with all his heart to know and do the will of Christ in everything. What is His will for the church? One place where we can determine His will is in the prayer which He offered for His disciples the night before He was crucified. What He prayed for them is surely His will for the church now. As we observed in the last lesson, this prayer is recorded in the seventeenth chapter of John.

Christ Wants the Church to Glorify His Father

In the first five verses of this seventeenth chapter of John Jesus stated the fact that He had glorified His heavenly Father on earth by accomplishing the work He gave Him to do. He was with the Father in glory before the world was; and, in this prayer, He asked God to receive Him back into that glory. Doing the will of God is the way Jesus glorified the Father, and that is the way His disciples glorify Him.

In the rest of the prayer, beginning with verse six, Jesus prayed for His

disciples.

Christ Wants the Church to Have Joy

He prayed, "... that they might have my Joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13). The Christians' joy is the greatest joy because it is the joy of Christ. Their love for God and for others is patterned after Christ's love. In fact, their love is God's love, put there by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). Their Joy is in doing the will of God, just as Jesus' joy was to do His will. They have joy because of the victory over the world which Jesus gained and which He has such joy in giving to them. His joy is their joy!

Christ Wants the Church to Be Sanctified

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:16-17). The word "sanctify" means "to set apart." Christian sanctification is to be separated from the evil of the world and set apart to the possession of God to live for Him. It Involves loving and practicing the purity and righteousness that pleases God. The word of God is the means by which Jesus' disciples are sanctified. They are instructed by the word and, in love for God, yield their lives to Him. Christ is working in His own to make them pure and free from all stain. The work will be completed when He returns. He will then receive the church perfected (1 John 3:2-3; Ephesians 5:25-27).

Christ Wants the Church to Be With Him and See His Glory

"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). To see His glory will be to share in it. In verse twenty-two, Jesus said He had given them the glory which God had given Him.

He Prayed for God's Love to Be in Them and Christ in Them

"And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them" (John 17:26). To have that is to have all God's blessings assured to us. If the church has all these things which Jesus desires for it, the result will be the glory of God.

Christ Wants Unity in the Church

"And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou

hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11).

Jesus said He had given them the word of God and sent them into the world, just as the Father had sent Him (John 17:8, 14, 18). It is through their word that others can come to believe in Christ. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:20-21).

Division among those who profess to be followers of Christ hinders the world from believing in Christ and falls to glorify God. But unity among believers glorifies God and gives power to the message of God. That is why the badly divided condition in the religious world today is a cause of sadness among those who love the Lord. It is contrary to what Jesus wants for His church, as we see in this prayer.

The Cause of Division

It is not difficult to find the cause, in a general way, of the division. It can be discovered by examining the prayer of Jesus which we have just noted in the seventeenth chapter of John. Jesus said He had given His disciples the name which the Father had given Him. He asked the Father to keep them through that name so they would be one. He also said He had given them the words the Father had given Him. He included us who believe, because He prayed for all who would believe on Him through their word. He prayed that they all might be one. From this we see that Jesus gave two things by which His followers could maintain unity. One is His name and the other His word. Failure to be faithful to His word and His name is responsible for division.

In Acts, chapter twenty, the apostle Paul was addressing the elders of the church at Ephesus, and he gave this prediction and warning, “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29). Thus it is failure to be true to the word of Christ that brings about division.

In Corinth the unity of the church was threatened by the people in the church giving to men the honor that belongs to Christ: “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? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase. So then neither is he

that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:3-7).

Lesson Eighteen

Basis for Unity in the Body of Christ

The point that stands out most strongly in Jesus’ prayer which we studied in the last lesson is Christ’s desire for unity among His disciples. In this lesson we shall consider further the authority of Christ as the basis for unity.

What Approach to the Problem of Division?

One approach to this problem has been the assumption that there cannot be unity unless everybody understands and accepts the correct teaching on everything. It would be expecting too much to expect all the members of the church to have an understanding of all truth. Therefore it was thought that there was a need for the church to have an official voice to define the doctrines to be believed and require the members of the church to accept it all on the authority of the church. Those who openly objected to the official decrees were regarded as heretics and not a part of the true church. In the Protestant Reformation the concept was emphasized that the scriptures are to be accepted as the right authority rather than the decrees of men speaking officially for the church. We believe this is the right approach, but the idea persisted that there must be uniformity. This resulted in official creeds or statements drawn up by men to define the uniform beliefs of certain groups or sects. Of course, this promoted further division.

Must Hold to the Faith

There must be tolerance in many areas, but we must also remember that there are certain essentials in the Christian faith. These essentials are clearly stated in the Scriptures and are not among the things that are hard to understand. These things must be Insisted upon. Jude wrote to Christians to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude, verse 3). The apostle Peter warned against false teachers, “... who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1).

As we have seen, from Acts 20:28-32, the elders or bishops of the church have the obligation to guard the members of the church from teachings that are clearly opposed to the truth of the gospel of Christ. The apostle Paul

wrote to the church at Rome. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Romans 16:17).

Faith in Jesus as the Son of God is essential for salvation. Paul mentioned some who trusted in keeping the commandments of the law for salvation instead of trusting in God’s grace through Christ. He would not tolerate that error, but said, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Galatians 5:4).

A person must have genuine faith in Christ and meet the conditions God gives for becoming a child of God by obtaining forgiveness of his sins.

Belief in the resurrection is essential. Some at Corinth were denying the resurrection, and that made whatever else they believed worthless to them: “Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain . . . and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:12-14,17). Denial of the resurrection, if tolerated in the church, would not only disrupt the unity but would destroy the life of the church.

Pure and righteous conduct by members of the church must be insisted upon. The church at Corinth was tolerating a flagrant case of fornication (1 Corinthians, chapter 5). Paul ordered them to deliver the guilty man to Satan to clear the church of complicity in the sin and in the hope that it would bring about the man’s salvation. He said, “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world . . . for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat” (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

Toleration of Differences

We must understand and hold to the essentials of the Christian faith, and these are clearly stated in the scriptures. But there are things in the Bible which are not so easily understood. We should not make the mistake of thinking we cannot have fellowship among Christians unless we all understand everything and are correct in our views on every point. Sometimes people seem to think that every time some issue arises it must be thrashed out and everybody comes to agreement in order to continue to have fellowship. There

must be toleration on many things among Christians who are sincerely seeking to know and follow all the truth from the scriptures.

An example of toleration is found in Romans, chapter fourteen. Some in the church at Rome were contending over the observance of days and eating of meats. Some thought it was wrong to eat meat while others correctly understood that there were no restrictions against eating it, Paul explained that those who held that it was permissible to eat the meat were correct, but they must not require everybody in the church to understand that in order to continue to have fellowship. Each one was to be persuaded in his own mind. If one thought it was wrong to eat meat, he would sin if he ate it. Those who understood the truth about it could eat meat without doing wrong, provided doing so would not cause a weak brother to sin by violating his conscience. They must not Judge one another over such issues. Read also First Corinthians, chapter eight.

Following the Right Authority

Christians have a relationship to God as individual children of God and will be judged on the last day as individuals. They also have a collective relationship to God In the body of Christ or the church. Individually and collectively we must seek to know and obey the will of Christ. Because of our human imperfections we will continue to need the forgiveness of God.

In coming to Christ the sinner repents of rebellion against God and yields to His will. Then he loves the Lord and His way and desires with his whole heart to understand and obey His will in all things.

Our obedience must be to Christ and not to human authority. In obeying Christ we will have His forgiveness for our failures, but if our obedience is to human authority our faith is misplaced.

Let us approach the word of God at all times with our minds completely open, ready to let God, through His word, correct and instruct us. If we approach the study of God's word with two questions in mind it will help to open our understanding of the things that are essential. One question is, "What must a person do to receive forgiveness and become a child of God?" The other is, "How can a child of God be pleasing to Him in his life every day?"

Lesson Nineteen

Kept in the Word and the Name of Christ

Kept in the Word of Christ

As we have already seen, when Jesus prayed for the unity of His disciples He prayed for them to be loyal to His word and to His name. Paul, to prevent the Christians from being led after perverse teachings, said, “. . . I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace ...” (Acts 20:29-32). The word of men is imperfect, but the word of God is perfect and is the only protection against destructive teachings.

The Body Controlled by the Head

We have observed that the church is the body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18,24). It is not surprising to find the Bible stating that there is one body: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). All Christians are in the one body.

The Holy Spirit compares the body of Christ to the human body in such a way as to indicate how unity can be maintained in the church, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink Into one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13).

Can you think of a greater example of unity than the human body? What is responsible for the unity of the body? All the members are controlled by the head or mind. Christ is the Head of His body, the church. As long as the members follow His will, and accept no authority but His, there is unity in the body. When the teachings of men are taken as authority the unity is disturbed (Acts 20:29).

This principle is stated in the following passage: “Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the Increase of God” (Colossians 2:18-19).

Kept in the Name of Christ

Jesus prayed, “... Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are” (John 17:11). God the Father has given authority to the Son to give life and execute judgment (John 5:21-27). After His resurrection, Jesus said, “All power is given unto me

in heaven and in earth” (Matthew 28:18). His name stands for the person, authority, and power of Christ which is the authority of God, because it is the name which the Father gave Him. When we honor the Son we honor the Father (John 5:22-23).

Salvation in His Name

In a sermon in Jerusalem the apostle Peter, speaking of the name of Christ, said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Most of those who wear a man-given name in religion agree that it is not necessary to wear that particular name, or any other such name, to be saved. Thus they recognize, in agreement with the passage we just noted, that salvation is in the name of Christ and none other. The names men have given for the people of God might represent zeal and good works, but only the name of Christ represents salvation.

Wearing man-given names was not necessary until people began to be divided and to oppose one another in teachings and practices. Why not lay aside all those human names and the human doctrines that make them necessary and be only Christians and follow only the word of God?

“Do All in the Name of Christ”

God has given the name of Christ His Son to His disciples to wear. There could be no greater honor. He wants His disciples to honor His name by doing everything in His name: “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” (Colossians 3:17). “In word or deed” means all we say or do, our teaching and our conduct. The Christian honors the name of Christ by wearing it and being faithful to the One who gave it.

When Paul learned that the Christians at Corinth were wearing the names of men he wrote, “... it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other” (1 Corinthians 1:10-16). This shows that Christians should not wear names of men but the name of

the One who was crucified, the One into whose name they were baptized. Read also 1 Corinthians 3:3-4 where it is said that they were carnal.

To be baptized in the name of Christ is to be baptized by His authority. It is to be baptized “into Christ” (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:26-27). It is to be baptized into union with Christ and into subjection to His authority. It is to become a member of the body of Christ of which He is the Head.

Paul’s statement to the Corinthians has caused some to think that only a few of the Corinthians were baptized, but that is not correct. An account of Paul’s first work in Corinth is given in the book of Acts. There we are told, “... many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). When Paul went to Corinth he was alone and would have to baptize the first converts himself. Then the new Christians could do the baptizing, and Silas and Timothy soon Joined him. Paul was commissioned to preach the gospel. Others could do the baptizing.

Can We Have Unity?

Will all sects ever discard their man-given names and doctrines and be Christians only and have unity? Not likely, but every one who will can do exactly that.

We can examine the scriptures and learn what a sinner must believe and do to become a child of God and what the Christian must do to retain the favor of God. We can put our faith in Christ, obey the requirements of the gospel, and continue to try our best to obey all that the Lord teaches.

In the beginning of the church the followers of Christ were just Christians. If a person now believes and does just what they believed and did in the beginning, as shown in the Scriptures, he will be a Christian. If he follows only what he finds in the Scriptures he will be just a Christian and nothing more. He will be a member of the body of Christ which is His church. If individuals who follow this simple course band together and worship and serve God together just as Christians, they will be simply a congregation or church of Christ as the Christians were in the beginning.

There are many churches of Christ today who are resolved to follow this course. They accept all the descriptive terms found in the Bible for the church, such as “church of Christ,” “church of God,” “church of the Lord,” etc. They do not have a central organization, but each congregation is independent under the authority of Christ, undertaking to follow the scriptures only and rejecting all man-made creeds or statements of doctrine. The members of these churches choose to be Christians only, in their effort to avoid

having part in the sin of division. Of course, they are not perfect, and they have not always maintained unity among themselves; but, recognizing that division is contrary to the will of God, they seek to follow the Scriptural way of unity. All should be simply Christians in the body of Christ, His church, and accept no authority but the word of God.

Faith is the way of salvation, and faith in Christ always expresses Itself in obedience to God from the heart. Failure to do this would indicate an absence of genuine faith. Let us reject everything we know to be wrong and endeavor to follow the right way perfectly, even though we are aware that we have human imperfection, trusting the Lord for His continued forgiveness.

Lesson Twenty

The Organization of the Church

As we have seen, the New Testament refers to the church in only two ways: as the universal spiritual body of Christ and as a local congregation. There are many local churches but only one universal church. Today the word “church” is used to designate a denomination, a way in which it is never used in scripture. God, in His word, gives the name of Christ to all His followers, but He never gives a name to distinguish Christians from one another. Biblical terms such as “church of God,” “church of the firstborn,” “churches of Christ,” “churches of the saints,” etc., are descriptive terms and apply to all the churches. They are not names to distinguish one church from another in doctrine or practice. The Bible refers to the church most often simply as “the church.”

Does the Bible Give an Organization for the Church?

For any group, religious or otherwise, to function there must be some kind of order. What kind of organization did the church have in New Testament times? If we find no particular order for the church in the New Testament we are free to adopt whatever order we choose. On the other hand, if we find a definite organization formed under the direction of the Spirit-guided apostles, and if it is always the same wherever it is described, we will be safe in concluding that God intended the church to have that kind of organization. This is exactly what we find in the New Testament.

Here are two New Testament passages stating that God appointed certain positions of service in the church:

“... And 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 fullness of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-13). Please read through verse sixteen.

“And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:28).

Some of the gifts mentioned In the passage In First Corinthians are not mentioned in Ephesians and some of them are miraculous gifts of the Spirit which were needed In the beginning when the truth of Christ was being newly revealed.

These passages indicate both a heavenly and an earthly organization.

The Heavenly Organization

The passage in Ephesians mentions Christ as the Head over the whole body. Both passages speak of the apostles and prophets. Nothing is said in the Bible about the apostles and prophets having successors. Through their writings in the scriptures they still serve the same purpose they served in the early period of the church. Therefore Christ, as Head, exercises authority over the whole body through His apostles and prophets whom He inspired with the Holy Spirit. See Ephesians 2:20.

The only other organization the New Testament reveals is the organization of each local church. The Bible does not set up a central ecclesiastical organization of men to have authority over the churches. The local churches worshiped and served God independently and cooperated when some good endeavor required it, as when Paul went among the Gentile churches to solicit help for the poor saints in Judea. The churches were united in a strong bond of fellowship under the headship of Christ.

Evangelists are mentioned in the passage in Ephesians. They proclaimed the gospel widely and established local churches. When they established churches they appointed people to places of leadership and service. In the beginning many of the evangelists, and possibly all, were prophets.

The Earthly Organization

After apostles and prophets, the rest of the positions of service mentioned pertain to the local church. The evangelists had a relationship with the churches they established and visited them to encourage and instruct them, as Paul did.

The other two positions mentioned in the passage in Ephesians are pastors and teachers. The pastor was also called “elder” and “bishop.” The Greek word for “bishop” is also translated “overseer.” The word occurs in Acts 20:28 and is translated “overseers” in the KJV and some other versions. It is translated “bishops” in that verse in the ASV and some other translations. The RSV renders it “guardians.” It signifies a shepherd of a spiritual flock. The word “pastor” is from a different Greek word and is also translated “shepherd.” So we see that “pastor,” “bishop,” and “elder” all refer to the same office. Paul sent for the “elders” of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20:17). When they came he addressed them as “bishops” (Acts 20:28). Elders or bishops are shepherds under the chief Shepherd, Christ (Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:1-4).

There were also deacons in the local churches. The word “deacon” means “servant.” The elders were the spiritual shepherds of the flock, and the deacons served the church under the oversight of the elders. We can see this organization of the local church in Paul’s salutation to the church at Philippi: “Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons” (Philippians 1:1).

It was uniform practice to appoint elders, or bishops, and deacons in the churches. As Paul and Barnabas returned from their first evangelistic journey they appointed elders along the way in all the churches they had established (Acts 14:23). Paul wrote to Timothy and gave him the qualifications for bishops and deacons (1 Timothy, chapter 3). He left Titus in Crete to appoint elders in every town and gave the qualifications they must have (Titus, chapter 1).

Conclusion

It must be significant that when the New Testament speaks of the organization it is always the same. The fact that the qualifications are given to both Timothy and Titus shows that it was uniform practice to have elders and deacons and that they should have those qualifications. It must also be significant that no order at all is given for any kind of central organization except on the spiritual plane with Christ as Head and the apostles and prophets as His ambassadors.

We may not know the reason for this type of organization, but one reason might be that error is less likely to take root in large numbers of churches when there is no authority of men to bind the error on the whole church. Error is more easily counteracted by the truth when every individual church under its elders is free to look into the word of God and learn from that pure source.

No matter how widespread error and corruption may become, the

word of God is still here, and those with a willing mind can take it and follow its simple teaching. This is more difficult to do when there is a strong central ecclesiastical organization.

Whether or not this is the reason for this congregational organization, it is the organization we find in the New Testament.

Lesson Twenty-One

The Church in the Christian's Life

The Importance of the Church

Jesus purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28). He loved the church and gave Himself up for it in order to cleanse it and sanctify it and finally bring it to Himself perfected, holy and free from every blemish caused by sin (Ephesians 5:25-27).

Since Jesus loves the church so much and paid such a great price for it, we should love it and serve God in it.

The Church and Sanctification

The Greek word translated “church” literally means “the called out.” The word “sanctify” means “set apart.” The church is those who have been called out of the world into fellowship with Christ and set apart to the possession and service of God. Having been cleansed and sanctified to the Lord, they become more like Jesus as they continue to learn of Him through the word of God and obey the truth as they learn it. Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Importance of the Local Church

The spiritual body or church of Christ Includes all who are in fellowship with Christ. It is the brotherhood of believers in Christ. The fellowship within this brotherhood finds expression in and through the local church. Not only does Jesus call people out of sin into fellowship with Him, but He also calls them into fellowship with one another. Therefore in every place where people obeyed the gospel a local church was established.

Worship in the Local Church

The meeting of people in the local church is so important that the Holy Spirit commands them not to forsake that assembly: “... let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and

so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

This shows that the regular meeting is Important for encouraging one another.

It is good for the church to meet at any time. In the very beginning they met daily in Jerusalem, but the passage in Hebrews shows there was also a regular time of meeting which they were told not to forsake.

The churches in the time of the New Testament assembled regularly on the first day of the week. We are given an example of this when Paul went to Troas: “And we ... came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:6-7).

It seems certain that the breaking of bread was eating the Lord’s supper. This conclusion is strengthened by a statement of Paul to the Christians at Corinth: “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? ...” (I Corinthians 11:20-22). In the verses following that statement, Paul instructs them as to how they should eat the Lord’s Supper. He does this by describing the simple way in which Jesus established the memorial. This indicates that when Christians assembled it was intended that they eat the Lord’s supper, but they could not do so in an acceptable way because of their conduct in the assembly.

It was wrong for the Christians at Corinth, by their perversion, to fall to eat the Lord’s supper when they came together. Many churches today fail to eat the Lord’s supper by neglecting it. In the regular worship on the first day of the week they do not leave out the singing or praying. Why should they leave out the Lord’s supper most of the time, especially when it is stated that it was the very purpose for which the church at Troas came together?

The Blessings of Fellowship in the Church

The Lord did not Intend for people to become members of His church and remain isolated disciples. He did not direct Christians to meet for worship and fellowship without a reason for so Instructing them. Christ is deeply concerned for our spiritual development and salvation, and He knows just what will produce that result. If we are committed to Him we want every blessing He has to give and are eager to do everything He wants us to do,

because of His love for us and our love for Him.

In our worship together in the assembly, we should seek to do everything Christ wants us to do, and only that. The New Testament shows us that the early church engaged in prayer (Acts 2:42), ate the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34), sang (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), read the scriptures (Colossians 4:16), preached (Acts 20:7), and gave (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). The forms and rituals of men as well as the creeds and names of men have no place in the church that is seeking to continue "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine."

Think of the joy of those first Christians. On the first day the gospel was preached many responded: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42). This is speaking of their worship and spiritual instruction.

"And they, continuing dally with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people" (Acts 2:46-47). This refers to their daily fellowship in all activities. Those who believe in the same Lord in whom they believed have the same promises and the same reason for Jubilation.

Those early Christians ministered to one another's needs (Acts 2:44-45). This is seen in Paul's statement, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). This Is part of fellowship in the local church.

Fellowship among Christians gives strength against temptation: "But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). We all need the strength that comes from such exhorting, because sin Is still deceitful.

The Way of Faith and Love

The way of the Lord is the way of faith and love. It is faith in and love for God and His Son Jesus Christ and love for one another. That Involves obedience to the commandments of the Lord, and faith and love are not genuine without obedience: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and everyone that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his com-

mandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:1-3).

When the sinner comes to have true faith in Christ he repents, and his faith moves him to be baptized in obedience to God for forgiveness (Acts 2:38). He is then in Christ (Galatians 3:26-27) and “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever” (1 Peter 1:23).

As an individual, having been born again, let each person in Christ seek to know and obey all of His will and avoid everything contrary to His will. If we know, from the scriptures, that something is contrary to God’s will and yet we do it by our willful choice, we are not walking in faith, and our love is not what it must be to have the favor of God.

Let us seek fellowship with other Christians in the church and together try to learn all the will of God for the church, and let us honor His name, and His name alone, by faithfully obeying Him. Let us never cease to praise Him for His love and forgiveness.

Lesson Twenty-Two

The Vine and the Branches

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:1-2, 5).

The Branches

Some have thought that the above passage refers to denominations as branches in the vine. But Jesus was addressing His disciples when He said, “I am the vine, ye are the branches.” The branches are individuals. This is further shown in the sixth verse, “If a man abides not in me ...” If the branches refer to denominations, the vine was without branches for a long time. Now, in the remainder of this lesson, let us give attention to what is taught in this passage rather than what is not taught.

When a penitent believer is baptized into Christ it is important that he realizes his relationship to Christ and the responsibility that the relationship incurs. Jesus uses the vine and its branches to teach that.

The proper function of a vine with its branches is to bear fruit. The fruit is borne on the branch, but the branch cannot bear fruit unless it remains in

the vine. It is God's purpose that the Christian bear fruit in Christ, and this is possible only if the Christian abides or remains in Christ. The life and power to bear fruit is not of the branch but of the vine.

In view of these truths, the great question is, "How does one abide in Christ?"

The answer to that is indicated in Jesus' words, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you..." (John 15:7). He further explained, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:10). This brings us back to the principle which has been emphasized so many times in these lessons, the principle of adhering to the word of Christ, the divinely inspired Scriptures, as the only guide in religious teaching and practice. If we do that we can be true disciples of Christ and bear much fruit. Knowing the word is not enough. We are not abiding in the word of Christ unless we are practicing, from the heart, in everyday life, the truths and principles which Jesus teaches in His word.

Bearing Fruit

The Christian must remember that he cannot be a true disciple of Christ and glorify God without bearing fruit, as Jesus so emphatically states in the allegory of the vine and the branches.

What does it mean to bear fruit? The apostle Paul gives a list of things that constitute the fruit of the Spirit: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:22-24). The Christian must bear fruit by cultivating those characteristics and living righteously.

We must bear fruit by doing good works in the name of the Lord: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). By reading Matthew 25:35-36 and James 2:15-17 we see some of the good works of a Christian.

Another way to bear fruit as a Christian is to seek to lead others to Christ. The seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11). When we sow the good seed in people's hearts God gives the increase: "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered: but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1

Corinthians 3:5-8), The fruit is seen when souls are added to Christ and the church is built up upon Christ. Some can bear more fruit than others, but each is to do what he can, and God will enable him to do more and more.

The Fruitless Branches

After a person has come into Christ it is possible for him to fail to bear fruit and be cast off. Jesus said, "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away:...If a man abides not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned" (John 15:2, 6). If one is cast off as a branch he is no longer in the vine. No one can be eternally saved apart from Christ.

A child of God has been given the Spirit of God and is instructed to abound in love, "... being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God" (Philippians 1:9-11). This cannot be accomplished without diligent prayer and study of the word of God.

Lesson Twenty-Three

The Last Will and Testament of Jesus

In an article, "What not to put in your will," in the November, 1951, issue of Medical Economics, a New York lawyer, Rene A. Wonnser, wrote, "I have yet to see the reading of a will, however lengthy, where those affected by it did not hang on every word."

We are affected by the greatest will ever made, the last will and testament of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The provisions of that will are so bountiful and its terms so gracious that we should "hang on every word!"

The Death of the Testator Put the Will into Force

A will comes into force only after the death of the one who made it. This was true of the will of Jesus: "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead..." (Hebrews 9:16-17). In this passage in Hebrews, and in the third chapter of Galatians, the Greek word, *diatheke*, is translated "will," "testament," and "covenant."

Forgiveness and the other spiritual blessings of God must be received on the terms of the new covenant, or will, of Jesus which could not become effective before He died.

This is very significant to us because it means we cannot go back to the Old Testament scriptures to learn the specific terms on which one today can

receive forgiveness from God. Many faithful people were accepted and blessed by God before Jesus came and died, but none of them can be taken as an example of what specific conditions a sinner must meet to receive the forgiveness of God and become a Christian. In those faithful people before Christ we can see certain attitudes and principles that have always been necessary to be right with God. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews many of them are given as examples to us of how faith obeys the conditions given by God, but the specific conditions a sinner must meet today are to be found only in the New Testament.

The Will Is Unalterable

A covenant of God cannot be changed: "... though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man dis- annulleth, or addeth thereto" (Galatians 3:15). Since this is true even of a man's covenant, it is certainly true of God's covenant. Paul, in Galatians, was alluding to the covenant God made with Abraham and saying that the law of Moses, which came later, could not annul it. This is true of any covenant of God, including the new covenant in Christ.

There was a change in covenants, but the old covenant given through Moses was not altered. It was fulfilled. Its purpose was accomplished and it gave place to the new covenant in Christ. The Mosaic covenant was temporary, and was given as part of God's plan to bring about the fulfillment of the promise He made in His covenant with Abraham. Jesus said He did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17).

The great promise in the covenant of God with Abraham was, "In thee shall all nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:8; Genesis 12:3). That looked forward to Christ through whom people of all nations are blessed (Galatians 3:16). After the promise was given to Abraham the law was given. The purpose of the law was to lead to Christ that we might be justified through faith in Him. Those in Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise God made to Abraham (Galatians 3:23-29). The purpose of the law being accomplished or fulfilled, it ended.

God confirmed the will of His Son by raising Him from the dead. That proved all the claims of Jesus to be true, and showed that all the power of God is behind every promise He gave (Acts 2:22-24, 36).

Let us accept the will of Christ without adding to it or taking from it. Paul pronounced a curse upon all who would preach a gospel contrary to the true gospel (Galatians 1:7-9).

The Terms Declared By the Executors of the Will

After Jesus died and arose He charged His disciples to go throughout the world and preach the gospel or make His will known. He told them what to preach, giving them the terms of the will. This charge of Jesus Is called “the great commission” and is found in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, In the last chapter of each book. To state it in modern terms, the apostles were appointed as the executors of the will and had the responsibility of making known its provisions and the terms on which its benefits could be received. Jesus said to them, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” (Matthew 28:18-19). “And he said unto them. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). “And said unto them. Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47).

Executing the Will

When Jesus gave His apostles the great commission. He told them to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come to guide them (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8). This was to give them the message Christ wanted them to preach and to guard them from error in preaching it (John 16:12-15).

The record of the coming of the Spirit is found in the second chapter of Acts. When the Spirit came they began to speak “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” In earlier lessons in this book we have seen what was preached oh that day. The people believed in Christ, were told to repent and to be baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of their sins, and they were promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. Notice that those terms were exactly the ones Jesus stated when He commissioned His apostles. The book of Acts is a partial account of the carrying out of that commission. A number of cases of conversion are related In that book, making clear, by example, the terms of the will.

Must Benefit Under the Terms of the Will

While a person lives he can give his possessions to any one he wishes, with or without giving conditions to be met for receiving them; but after his

will is put into force by his death any one who receives anything will have to receive it according to the terms of the will. If conditions are stated in the will they must be met. Only the testator has the right to make or change the terms. In the same way, before Jesus died He granted forgiveness. He forgave the man who was let down through the roof (Matthew 9:1-8). He forgave the woman who washed His feet with her tears (Luke 7:47). He forgave the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43).

All those cases were before Jesus died and, therefore, before His new covenant or will went into force. We learn the terms of His will from His commission to His apostles and from what they preached. Failure to understand this has caused many to think a sinner can be saved while rejecting Christ's command to be baptized. The sinner must obey the command because it is a stated condition in the will of Christ. Genuine faith in the Testator moves one to obedience.

Continue to Follow Jesus

Surely we should be more interested in the blessings that come through the last will and testament of Jesus Christ than in the benefits of any other will. We should learn His will, "hang on every word," and obey in faith.

May God always bless you, the reader of this little book, in the study of His word and lead you to obey Him from the heart in all things.