

**Finding
the
Answers**

John Thiesen

Published By:

World Evangelism Publications

P O Box 72

Winona, MS 38967

© Copyright 2002 J.C. Choate Publications

Cover Design: Betty Burton Choate
Layout: Barbara A. Oliver

First Printing, 2002

Order From:

World Evangelism Publications

P.O. Box 72

Winona, Mississippi 38967

Phone: (662) 283-1192

E-Mail: Choate@WorldEvangelism.org

Web site: www.WorldEvangelism.org

www.GospelGazette.com

Publisher's Statement

Brother John Thiesen wrote and preached these sermons on the radio in Missouri where he worked for a number of years as a gospel preacher for the church of Christ. Later, he and his wife, Ann, and their children moved to the African country of Malawi, serving as missionaries there for more than 20 years. While in Malawi he wrote, printed, and distributed millions of tracts. Because of health problems, brother Thiesen returned to the States in 2001. He now serves as a staff writer of **The Voice of Truth International** and is doing the translation for a Spanish Edition of that magazine.

When John submitted his radio sermons to us for printing, there was enough material for two books. The first volume poses many **Questions People Ask about the Bible** (with biblical answers), and the second one aids readers in **Finding the Answers** (to many of the biblical questions they would ask). Because people everywhere have the same general religious concerns and confusions, we feel that these books will be useful both in the US and overseas. It is vitally important that the answers for spiritual questions come from the Bible, the only guide given by God to safely lead us to eternal life with Him.

We thank brother Thiesen for making these sermons available to us for printing. It is our prayer that as you read them they will help you to understand the scriptures more fully, and encourage you to become a Christian and a member of the Church of Christ. Then, as a Christian, we pray that they will help you to grow and to be better prepared to pass these truths on to your friends and loved ones.

J. C. Choate
Winona, MS
April 1, 2002

Introduction

We live in a world where there is much turmoil and confusion. As a result, there are many people who are looking for answers to life and their reason for being. They want to be assured that there is a God and that he has a purpose for them in the world.

My wife Ann and I can identify with these seekers of truth. We ourselves have been among these who are earnestly looking for something. Thank God we found the answers in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who said "*I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me*" (John 14:6).

Shortly after we were baptized into Christ, I began plying the minister who baptized us, Gerald Ball, with questions. He was the evangelist of the Church of Christ in Leavenworth, Kansas where I was stationed in the Army. I am afraid I almost totally wore him out with my questioning, but he was very patient and never failed to supply an answer.

Jerry had a unique way of answering my spiritual interrogations. Instead of answering a question verbally, he would just smile and quietly open the Bible, then silently point to a particular passage and let me read for myself. I was astounded to find the Scripture supplying me with exactly the answer I was seeking, without the necessity of a human interpreter to explain it to me. I was deeply impressed, and continue to be until this day, that the Bible has all the answers to questions pertaining to "*life and godliness*" (2 Peter 1:3).

This is a truth I have found demonstrated over and over since that time until the present. A few years later, I was conducting a

Bible question and answer TV program on KFEQ TV, St. Joseph, Missouri. Each week, I invited another minister from the Kansas City area to join me in answering questions. Without my prompting him in advance as to how to answer the questions to be discussed, inevitably we both came up with identical answers from the Bible.

It is my prayer that, as you read this little book, you will also discover that the Bible is the place to find the answers to all your spiritual needs. God be with you in your search.

—John Thiesen

Table of Contents

Publisher's Statement.....	i
Introduction.....	ii
Greatness	1
The Last Days	4
Predestination	7
Faith and Works	10
Church Creeds.....	13
The Baptism of the Holy Ghost	16
Christ's Resurrected Body	19
A Second Chance	22
Riches Bring Responsibility	25
Tithing	28
Church's Name	31
Titles	34
Human Wisdom	36
Feelings	39
Prayer	41
Live Again	44
Paradise	47
Few Saved	50
Heaven Offered to All.....	53
True Church Visible	56
God's House	59
Judged by Words.....	62
Lost Again	65
Headquarters of the Church of Christ.....	68
Rebaptism	71
Kingdom of God	75
The New Man	79

Chief Cornerstone	82
Binding and Loosing.....	85
Imperishable Words of Christ	88
Holy Days	90
Second Coming of Christ	94
Devil	96
Inspiration	99
Priorities	102
Preparation for an Afterlife.....	104
John the Baptist.....	107
“Other Sheep”	110
Gospel Is for All	113

Greatness

“What is the test of true greatness?”

There are many ideas about what greatness is. Some might say that a political leader who could solve the problems of hunger, illiteracy, or social inequality would be the greatest kind of man. Others would point to scientists whose discoveries may eliminate disease or suffering as examples of greatness. Many would stress intellectual attainments. These would consider a person as great who can solve difficult questions of the mind and the spirit.

But have you ever wondered what kind of man is great in God’s eyes? God made us and is vitally interested in us. He gave every man and woman the physical characteristics and talents they possess. Since God is so interested in us, he must regard certain ones as greater than others. On one occasion, Jesus said that, indeed, he does. Let’s study Christ’s estimation of a great man. The passage is found in Luke 22:23-27.

What brought about Christ’s comments on greatness was the argument among his disciples as to who would be the greatest, recorded in verse 24. Then it was that Jesus said to them, *“The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them: and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve”* (verse 25,26).

Greatness in Servanthood

Now here is a peculiar twist! Christ said that the greatest among his disciples would be the servant of the others. The

greatest would act as if he were the younger! Ordinarily, the older receives the respect from the younger. Notice that God regards the man who humbles himself below his fellows as the greatest. In a parallel passage, Jesus said, *“And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:27,28)

Jesus Christ himself is our supreme example of greatness. Matthew said that he came, not to be served or to be ministered to, but to minister or serve others. While Jesus walked the earth, he humbled himself and went about helping people. He healed the sick, restored sight to the blind, cast out devils, and preached the gospel. Instead of people looking after his wants, he was doing for them. Truly, Jesus was the greatest man who ever lived in every respect! He was the living illustration of his teaching on greatness.

God Loves the Humble

In order to understand why God looks upon a humble man as great, we need to realize that God despises pride in people. This is one of man's besetting sins, his tendency to think of himself too highly and to step on others in order to elevate himself. The proverb writer, Solomon, wrote: *“Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished”* (Proverbs 16:5). Peter adds, *“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time”* (1 Peter 5:5,6).

God actually resists the proud. Many sins are due to pride.

People who look down their noses at others who do not have the money, possessions, education or social status that they do commit this sin. Others will do anything to get social or financial gain. We must realize that nothing that we have is our own. God is just letting us use it. Some day we shall leave it all and then must give account to God for how we used his property during our lifetime.

God loves a humble person and, as we have seen, will exalt him one of these days. When Christ comes, he shall receive a glorious crown of life for his efforts. The humble Christian will have the privilege of sitting down with Christ in his throne. On the other hand, the proud man will be abased, cast into outer darkness and the shame and misery of everlasting separation from God.

The Last Days

“Are we in the last days?”

Yes, the Bible does teach that we are in the last days. Several of the inspired writers have come right out and said so. However, what they meant and what people today mean by this term “last days” may be different things. Today, when it is used, people are thinking of the second coming of Christ as being almost here. But when the Bible writers used the words “last days” they meant the **last age** in which God deals with men.

Remember that there have been three distinct ages of time in Biblical history. The first age was that period of time prior to the giving of God’s law through Moses to the Israelites. In that age, we see God contacting and dealing with individuals such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Then, when Moses led Israel, the nation of people who had descended from these men, out of Egyptian bondage, God started a new age in his dealing with mankind. He now worked through that nation, the Israelites, as his special people. Finally, when Christ came and died on the cross, arose from the dead, and went back to Heaven, the scene was set for a brand new age — called by the apostles the “last days.” How do we know this? Let’s look into the Bible and see:

When the Last Days Began

According to the prophet Joel, who lived during the second age of the law of Moses and who himself was an Israelite prophet, the “last days” would come when the Holy Spirit was poured out and salvation was offered in Jerusalem. He said, *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh”* (Acts 2:17). The apostle Peter, who

was quoting Joel in this Scripture, concluded this prophecy with Joel's words: *"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Acts 2:21). The apostle Peter was in Jerusalem and was explaining what thousands of Jews were at that very moment witnessing, the miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles and the signs and wonders being worked there that day. Peter explained, *"This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel"* (verse 16). *And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (verse 17). He told them that what they were seeing with their own eyes was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy of what would happen in the "last days." It is significant that Peter offered Christ's terms of salvation to the people there in Jerusalem that very day, just as Joel had predicted would happen in the last days.

God Speaks to Us Through His Son

Other passages which bear out Peter's words are these: the Hebrew writer tells us in Hebrews 1:2 that God *"hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son."* The last days are characterized by the fact that they are the time during which God speaks to man through his Son, Jesus Christ. Today, God speaks to us through Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are in the last days.

In conclusion, the term "last days" refers to the last age of God's dealing with men. Mankind has been in the last days ever since Christ established the church there in Jerusalem on Pentecost day, 33 A.D. This age is also called the *"fullness of the time."* God called it by this name when he told the churches of Galatia, *"But when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law"* (Galatians 4:4). Although Christ was born under the law, the second age of

time, he arose from the grave to usher in the last days. Christ came when the fullness of time had arrived.

This is not to minimize the importance of being prepared for the second coming of Christ. After all, the last days have been here for almost 2,000 years now, and you and I are much closer to Christ's coming than the people on Pentecost were when these days began. However, the term does not refer to the last few weeks, months or years just prior to the Lord's return, but to the entire age in which God speaks to us through his Son. When this age ends, so will this world, and there will be no further ages to follow — just the endless aeons of eternity.

Predestination

“Does the Bible teach the doctrine of predestination?”

To predestine means literally to “destine or decree beforehand; to foreordain” (Webster). The verb “predestinate” means the same thing. The Bible definitely teaches a certain kind of predestination, but not the kind that most people think of when they hear the word. Some say that God predestinated every one of us either to go to Heaven or to Hell, and that there is nothing we can do to change this decree that was made before the world even began. Many are fatalists today, thinking that everything is already cut out for us — that we have no power to alter the trend of things or our “destiny.” But this idea is not true. God has predestinated that those who come to believe in Christ will enter into eternal life, but he did not predestinate which one of us would believe. He has left that up to us individually. Let’s look at the two New Testament passages which teach predestination and see exactly what it is that God has predestinated.

God’s Foreknowledge

The first passage is found in Romans 8:29: *“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”* Notice that there is a distinction between “foreknowledge” and predestination. God “foreknew” his people. Those whom God foreknew are identified in this chapter and in chapter 11 as believers in Christ. But the ability to look down through time, foresee the future, and make provision to save believers through Christ does not mean that God decreed which persons would believe and which would not. The fact that God

has sent out the gospel message to persuade people to believe in Christ shows that their minds can be changed from unbelief to faith.

Notice what God predestinated in this passage: he predestinated that believers would “*be conformed to the image of his Son*” (Romans 8:29). He did not predestinate which people would become believers, but he did predestinate that, when people came to believe, they would be conformed to his Son’s image.

Our Free Choice

I think that you can see what this means by a simple illustration. Suppose I open a store today and make a decree, publishing it in the local newspaper and announcing it over the radio, that the first twenty customers in my store will receive a free prize. I predestinate that the first twenty will get the prize. When the twenty arrive, I am faithful to my promise and they receive their reward. I have predestinated that those twenty will be the lucky ones. However, I didn’t predestinate which particular twenty would show up first. They did that, not I. They had the choice and they chose to beat the rest of the crowd there and collect the prize. Any other twenty would have received it if they had reached there first. The same is true with God’s predestinating. God decreed from the beginning of the world that those who believe in his Son would be conformed to his Son’s image. The fact that God foreknows all things does not mean that he predestinates which ones will believe.

God’s Impartiality

The other passage is in Ephesians 1:4,5: “*According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love; Having*

predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” Paul is telling believers again that they are chosen to *“be holy and without blame before him in love.”* God chose that believers would be this way before God. However, he did not choose which individuals would believe and which would not, lest he violate his own nature of being a God who shows no partiality. Peter said that God is not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34,35).

God loves all people equally and impartially, shown in that he gave Christ for every man’s sins (Hebrews 2:9). In our Ephesians 1:4 text, Paul shows that God predestinated believers *“to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself.”* Again, God did not decree which would believe, but he did decree that whoever believed would become his adopted children. In this sense, the Bible does teach predestination.

Faith and Works

“Is it true that we will be saved by faith only without works?”

The Bible speaks of a “dead faith” which does not have the power to save us. Dead faith is having faith in the existence of God, but failing to obey God’s commandments. The passage that describes this type of faith is James 2:20. Unfortunately, too many have this kind of faith. They believe in God and in his Son, but they do not obey God. The term “dead faith” does not mean that their faith is non-existent. A dead body exists and has not disappeared. But it is inactive, just lying there, with its powers to move, walk and talk inoperative. So it is with people who believe, but who do not work for God. Their faith is lifeless, inactive, and powerless to save them

Faith Without Works Is Dead

In this passage, James shows the relationship of faith and works.

An interesting story is told, based on the teachings of James, of an old Scotsman who used to operate a small rowboat for carrying passengers across one of the little lakes in Scotland. One day, a passenger noticed that he had carved on one oar the word “Faith” and on the other oar the word “Works.” Curiosity led the passenger to ask the meaning of this.

The old man replied, “I will show you.” He dropped one oar and plied the other called “Works” and the little boat just went around in circles. Then he dropped that oar and began to use the one called “Faith,” and the little boat went around in circles again, this time in the opposite direction. After this demonstra-

tion, the old man picked up both “Faith” and “Works” and, using both oars together, sped swiftly over the water. He explained to the curious passenger, “You see? That is the way it is in the Christian life.”

The old Scotsman had hit the nail on the head. That is exactly what James is explaining in the Bible. He is telling Christians that they cannot be saved on the basis of their faith alone without doing the works of God. He asked, “*What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone*” (James 2:14-17)

The Faith of Demons

Obviously, the answer to James’ question, “*Can faith save him?*” is that faith will not save a man who ignores the needs of others. This is also why the demons, or devils, can not be saved. Had you ever considered the fact that devils believe in Jesus Christ? There are examples in the life of Christ when they even confessed his name and called him the Son of God. Now, a lot of people today are telling us that all you have to do is confess Christ and you’ll be saved. They tell us that works have absolutely nothing to do with our salvation. But if this is the case, why won’t the devils be saved? They confess Christ, they tremble at God, they believe in God and in his Son, and yet they are not saved. James said, “*Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?*”

(James 2:19,20). The reason that the devils that believe will not be saved is because their works are evil. They are disobedient to God. So it is with man. He may say he believes in God, but if his faith does not lead him to obey God, it does not profit him. He is just as bad off as the devils.

On the other hand, many think that they can be just good citizens and have a high moral code and get along without God and Christ in their lives. They are also badly mistaken. For, to attempt to do this is to be without the grace and mercy of God for their sins. We need Christ to take away our sins, and it is "*impossible to please God*" if we do not have faith (Hebrews 11:6). At the same time, it is impossible to please God if we continue to live in disobedience to him. Just like the old Scotsman using both oars, when we combine faith in God and obedience to his commands, we get somewhere with God!

Church Creeds

“Do you believe in the writing of church creeds to govern the church?”

Before answering this question, we need to look at what the term “creed” means. One of Webster’s definitions shows how the word is used when speaking of church creeds. He said, “1. A brief statement of religious belief. 2. a specific statement of this kind, accepted as authoritative by a church, as, the Apostles’ Creed.” Webster said that the word comes from the Latin word “Credo,” meaning literally, “I believe.”

Today, churches which have a written creed do hold the beliefs recorded in their creed as authoritative. The creed is supposed to contain the tenets that church holds to be true.

Even though most creeds contain some or much truth in them, the Bible teaches that it is not right for uninspired men to sit down and write authoritative articles of faith for the people of God. The reason it is not is because they have not been given this authority from Christ, the sole head of the church. Paul tells us that God gave Christ to be the head over all things to the church (Ephesians 1:22,23). Not that Christ, the head of the church, has not given some men the authority to write laws binding upon the church — he has! But those men were the apostles and prophets of the early church, not men of our day.

God’s Chosen Creed Writers

The apostles and prophets were personally chosen by Christ for this important work of revealing his word to mankind. Paul, speaking of this special revelation of Christ’s “creed” to mankind said that it *“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 3:5). These apostles and prophets were Christ's official creed speakers and writers. The early church "*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine*" (Acts 2:42).

But, what the apostles delivered, whether by letter or orally, they did not make up out of their own heads. They received these things by the Spirit of God. As one of them explained, "*Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth*" (1 Corinthians 2:13). That's the big difference between those inspired men and our modern creed writers: The apostles got their messages from Heaven, out of God's wisdom. They did not claim to write information from their own acquired intellectual abilities. However, these modern creed writers are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, and their creeds are couched in their own words and phrases from their own human wisdom. Neither do they claim that their pronouncements are inspired of God.

Modern Creed Makers Err

Because their writings are fallible and uninspired, their creeds must be revised periodically. On the other hand, the official creed of God, the Holy Scriptures or writings of the apostles and prophets, never go out of date. The Bible is just as authoritative today as when it was written. It remains the word of God to the end of time, and you and I will be judged by it then.

The Bible is capable of completely furnishing us with all knowledge and information we need for faith and practice. Listen to one of the apostles make this claim for the Holy 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)

This being the case, where is the need for a group of uninspired men to sit down today and try to write out an official document telling us what to believe and practice? The need is not there, because God has already done this in the Holy Scriptures. Neither has he given these men the authority to speak for him. Their efforts are vainglorious and presumptuous in his sight.

The Baptism of the Holy Ghost

“What is the baptism of the Holy Ghost?”

The baptism of the Holy Ghost was a special baptism Christ performed on the apostles of Christ, and later on Cornelius and his household. These were the only two occasions recorded in the Bible of its use. It was not a baptism promised to you and me, or all believers, but was especially performed for specific reasons which we will examine now.

Apostles of Christ Baptized

The first occasion of the baptism of the Holy Ghost occurred on the first Jewish feast day of Pentecost following Jesus' resurrection. Christ had purposely sent the eleven apostles (Judas was dead) into Jerusalem in order to be there on this day when he was going to pour out the Holy Ghost upon them. *“And being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water: but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost many days hence”* (Acts 1:4,5). With the baptism of the Holy Ghost, Jesus told them that they would be especially empowered. *“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”* (verse 8).

These apostles obeyed Jesus' command and went into Jerusalem to await this miraculous coming of the Holy Ghost. Acts chapter 2 records that momentous day: *“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and*

it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:2-4). Notice, they spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. This was a fulfillment of Christ’s promise that the apostles would be miraculously guided in the selection of words to preach the gospel. Jesus had earlier promised them that the Holy Ghost would teach them all things and bring all things to their remembrance which he had already personally taught them (John 14:26). When we remember that the apostles were vessels which Christ filled with his teachings, and that they were specially chosen eye witnesses for him, we can understand why they would not be sufficiently equipped without divine guidance. Human minds without such guidance could not retain infallibly all that Christ had taught them. On Pentecost, the apostles were also enabled to speak to Jews from every nation and tongue under heaven as the multitudes rushed to the spot to see what the commotion was (Acts 2:5-11). Even though they had not studied all those languages, they could preach in them.

Cornelius and His Household

The other occasion for the use of the baptism of the Holy Ghost was some years later when Christ performed it on the Gentile Cornelius and his people. Prior to this time, no Gentile had yet been admitted into the church. The Jews did not yet understand that the gospel was for them. And so, as Luke records in Acts chapters 10 and 11, God first taught Peter a lesson in a vision that God had done away with the Old Testament teaching on ceremonially clean and unclean animals. Then, Peter was led to Cornelius’ house where he was permitted to preach to this

Gentile and his household. As he spoke, God baptized Cornelius and the other Gentiles with him with the Holy Ghost. Peter then asked his fellow Jews, "*Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?*" (Acts 10:47).

Afterwards, as Peter explained these things to the Jews in Judaea, they arrived at the same conclusion, saying, "*Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life*" (Acts 11:18). In this second and final case of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, God used it to demonstrate that he was also ready to grant salvation to Gentiles as well as to the Jews. By using the miracle of the baptism of the Holy Ghost, he removed from the minds of the Jewish Christians all prejudice against Gentiles being admitted into the church.

Christ's Resurrected Body

“Did Jesus come out of the grave with his original flesh and blood body? And if so, does he also now wear the same body in Heaven?”

In reply to the first part of this question, Jesus did have the same body when he came out of the grave that was put in the grave three days before. The way we know this is by Jesus' own words and the testimony of eyewitnesses who touched and handled his body after his resurrection. On the evening of the day he arose, he appeared to his disciples and said, *“Peace be unto you.”* Luke records that *“they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit”* (Luke 24:36,37). This was Jesus' chance to demonstrate that he was not just in spirit form. He told them, *“Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have”* (verse 39). Jesus plainly said that the body he was wearing was not of spiritual composition, but of flesh and bones. Then he showed them his hands and his feet, which had received the nails that fastened him to the cross (verse 40).

One of the disciples, Thomas, was not with them at this first appearance to the group. When they told him about it, he couldn't believe it. He told them, *“Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe”* (John 20:25). A week later, Jesus appeared to them all again, and he told Thomas, *“Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing”* (verse 27). Thomas did so and said, *“My Lord and my God.”* This proof was too much for him. He knew beyond a

shadow of a doubt that this was the same Jesus, and the same body, which he had witnessed killed by the Roman soldiers. The testimony of these eyewitnesses assures us beyond doubt that Jesus' fleshly body had come out of the grave.

Christ's Changed Body in Heaven

Now for the second part of the question. Does Jesus wear that same flesh and bone body in Heaven? No, he does not. When Christ ascended back to Heaven, his body underwent a change. The reason we know this is that the apostle Paul explains that when Christ comes again he "*shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*" (Philippians 3:21). Our bodies must be changed to become like the body he now wears. Therefore, our present bodies are not made of the same substance that his is. Since our bodies are of flesh, blood, and bone, we conclude that he does not wear a flesh, blood, and bone body now that he is in Heaven. Notice, our bodies shall be like his.

Flesh and Blood Cannot Inherit Heaven

In 1 Corinthians 15, the apostle describes what our bodies will be like. He said that "*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption*" (1 Corinthians 15:50). Then, he contrasts the resurrected body with our present body on earth. He said that "*it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body*" (verse 44). The body that is "sown" (buried) in the grave is not made of the same substance as the body that springs forth in the resurrection. Our fleshly bodies are suited for existence on this earth. They are flesh and subject to corruption as all material is. But the body that comes out of the

grave will be spiritual in nature, not subject to corruption.

We do not know exactly what that body shall be like. We know that Paul, in this chapter of 1 Corinthians, describes it as “*incorruptible,*” “*glorious,*” “*powerful,*” and “*spiritual*” (verses 42-44). The apostle John said of the resurrection: “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is*” (1 John 3:2).

We may not know exactly what that body shall be like, but we know enough from these passages to make us want it and to work for the Lord in order to attain it!

A Second Chance

“Will there be a second chance for salvation after death?”

Some people are hoping for a second chance. One idea widely believed is that there will be a purifying ground beyond the grave for people who did not live as they should in this life. It is suggested that some sins committed will not eternally separate the sinner from God, but just for a period of time only. He simply goes to be punished temporarily in an intermediate state and, when he has received sufficient punishment, will be escorted on into Heaven. A variation on this teaching is the idea that Christ will go and preach to those in the afterworld and offer them a second chance. If they repent, they will have forgiveness and go into life; but if they fail to repent in that afterworld, they will be cast off.

No Place of Purification After Death

These theories are not taught in God's word, the Bible. The Scriptures do not teach of an intermediate place of purification. "Hades" is spoken of in the Scriptures as a place of detention for souls until the resurrection. And, there is punishment there. However, there is no passage which indicates that another chance will be granted.

The Bible teaches that the preaching of the gospel of Christ in this present world is the only opportunity that people will have to be forgiven of their sins. The Hebrew writer said, *"For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries"* (Hebrews 10:26,27). In this Scripture, we find

that those who learn the truth have only that chance in this life. But, if they reject it, they have nothing to look forward to in the afterworld but the wrath of God in the judgment.

Now Our Only Time to Prepare

We shall have no other chance of salvation if we waste our opportunity in this life. If people could only realize this truth, no person would be putting off his or her salvation. It is the hope that God is going to overlook all our sin and rebellion and save us anyway that keeps many from being concerned about their souls. It is just not that way at all. When this life is over, all opportunities for preparation shall cease. We shall give account in the judgment for the deeds done while in the body, not those done out of the body (2 Corinthians 5:10).

When Christ comes, the apostle Paul informs us that he will come *“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 the glory of his power”* (2 Thessalonians 1:8,9). Everlasting is a long time. It does not allow for a second chance.

With this knowledge and forewarning, it is high time that we all become serious about where we shall be spending eternity. People are wasting precious days and years in concerning themselves with the trivialities of this life only. When God and his Son Jesus Christ should be the center of their lives, they are serving their temporal desires instead. My friend, when you and I stand before the judgment seat of Christ, with an endless eternity yawning at our feet, then the projects and ambitions which so consumed our time on earth, robbing it from God who deserved our love and service, shall appear pitifully insignificant.

Are you taking advantage of this one and only chance that you will ever have to prepare yourself for the judgment? Have you set your affections on that eternal city in Heaven, rather than on the corruptible, vanishing things of material earth? This is the most important question of your life, because when you and I die, our opportunities to get ready to meet God shall die with us.

Riches Bring Responsibility

“What obligations toward his fellowman does God put on the rich?”

A rich man is one who has been blessed with more material wealth and possessions than most of his fellows. Because God has blessed him more, God expects more out of the rich man in regard to his possessions. Of course, this principle is not only true of the wealthy, but of others who have been given an abundance of talents as well. Jesus expressed it in this way: *“For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more”* (Luke 12:48). Let’s look at some things which God requires of the wealthy.

Responsibilities Toward Employees

Since most of the rich acquire wealth through a business which they operate, many of them have employees. The Bible teaches that they have responsibilities toward their workers. One of these is to pay them a decent wage which they can live on. This is not to say that all wealthy people cheat their employees, but there is a temptation to do so and many have increased the profits of their business through lowering wages and benefits to the impoverishment of their workers. This is a common practice nowadays.

James wrote, *“Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure*

together for the last days. Behold the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth” (James 5:1-4). Notice, among other things in this passage, that James says these wealthy men had kept back part of their laborers’ wages. The cries of the poor rose to the ears of God, who will remember such offenses in the day of Judgment. The rich got richer and the poor got poorer, and God remembered.

Obligations to the Poor

Another responsibility of the rich is to give generously to relieve the poor and to forward the spread of the gospel. In the same passage we have just read from the book of James, he said that the rich man’s money stacked up in the bank collecting canker would eat his flesh like fire in the day of judgment.

This excessive amount of money hoarded for the time of retirement testifies to the fact that the rich man was selfish and was not using the money for relieving the suffering and doing good in this world. He was interested only in himself and his own wants. The more money he made, the more he saved for himself. There was none left over for any benevolent purpose toward others. A prime example of this is the rich man described in the 12th chapter of Luke. He had so much surplus that he was contemplating building bigger barns to hold it all in preparation for his future retirement years. God told him, *“Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God”* (verse 20,21).

The wealthy are in a position to do more good for their fel-

lowmen than most other people. But, tragically, few exercise their power. Paul commanded that the rich Christians “*do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate (share)*” (1 Timothy 6:18). There is only so much that we can eat, so many clothes that we really need, so many pieces of furniture that are necessary, so many features and extras on a car that are essential, and so much recreation and entertainment that we really require in order to rest and amuse ourselves. Most things that lie beyond these constitute overindulgence. It is when we hoard our riches and forget the poor that our desire for the things of this world begin to endanger our relationship with God.

Tithing

“Does God require Christians to give ten per cent?”

This is a very good question, because many today teach that Christ wants us to tithe. However, when we go to our Bibles, we learn that tithing was an Old Testament institution given to the Jews and not a New Testament law of Christ for Christians to practice.

Tithing an Old Testament Institution

The tithe was God’s provision for one of the twelve tribes of Israel. When Israel entered the promise land of Canaan, all the other tribes were given a tribal area with lands all their own. But the Levites were restricted to cities within all the tribes. They did not receive a tribal area. As a result, God instituted tithing among the Jews in order to provide for these people. God explained to Aaron, himself a Levite and a priest: *“And behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation”* (Numbers 18:21). All the rest of the tribes gave a tenth in order to support this one priestly tribe which was to be engaged in work around the holy Tabernacle. God continued:

“But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the Lord; I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance” (verse 24).

When Christ came and died on the cross, he did away with this system of supporting a priestly tribe with tithes. The Israelite nation ceased to be God’s special people. Now Christ instituted

a new nation of believers in him, found throughout the world, made up of both Jews and Gentiles, called the church. Today, there is no longer a tribe of people known as Levites in need of support by other tribes. Those who today argue that the tithe is still in effect are going to have to resurrect ancient Israel, reestablish all the animal sacrifices and the priestly tribe of Levi, and go back to the law of Moses all the way. This is because the tithe was of the law of Moses and not of the gospel of Christ. This is a simple problem of rightly dividing the word of truth, putting things in right places when we go to the Bible.

Giving in the Church

It is true that Christians still pool their money for good works. But the teaching governing this collection is different than that taught under the law. Christ instituted a system of giving on the first day of each week as each member has prospered. Paul said, *“Upon the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come”* (1 Corinthians 16:2)

The tithe, on the other hand, was a yearly collection from the harvest of the land, as the seasons rolled around. God commanded Israel, *“Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year”* (Deuteronomy 14:22).

No specific amount is commanded of Christians, but certain guiding principles govern their giving. Each member knows whether or not he or she has violated these principles and, of course, God knows. First, the Christian’s giving is to be liberal and abundant. Paul said, *“He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully”* (2 Corinthians 9:6).

Second, the Christian's giving must be from his heart according to that which he has purposed to give to God. Paul continued, "*Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver*" (2 Corinthians 9:7). God knows a man's heart, whether or not he has given willingly and out of love. This is the only kind of service God will accept. A man may throw in a thousand dollars grudgingly and his gift be worthless in God's sight as compared to the widow's one dollar given cheerfully out of her poverty.

No, ten per cent giving is not a command to Christians, but cheerful and liberal contributions given from the heart are what he wants.

Church's Name

“Does the Bible give a name by which the church should be called?”

In the New Testament, the church is called by several names, all of which are descriptive of its relationship either to God or to his Son Jesus Christ.

The first mention of the word “church” is found in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus first announced that he was going to build it. He said, *“And upon this rock, I will build my church.”* Here, Jesus calls it his church. Therefore, it is accurate and scriptural to say that it is the “church of Christ” because it belongs to him and he built it. When the apostle Paul sent greetings to the church in Rome from the various congregations with which he had been laboring, he told them: *“The churches of Christ salute you”* (Romans 16:16).

Because of the church's connection to Jesus as its head, members of his church are compared to a human body with the Lord compared to its head. We are told that when God raised Jesus from the dead and lifted him up far above all powers and authorities, he 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). Since members of Christ's church take directions from Jesus as their spiritual head, we can readily understand what is meant by comparing Christ and his church to a human body with a head. So, here we see another designation for the Lord's church, **“the body of Christ.”**

But the church not only belongs to Christ, it also belongs to his Father, God. Therefore, we find several passages calling it

the **“church of God.”** Paul addressed his letter to the disciples in Corinth *“unto the church of God which is at Corinth”* (1 Corinthians 1:2). Since God is the one who conceived man’s salvation and sent his Son to die for man’s sins and purchase the church with his blood, it is entirely appropriate and Biblically accurate to call it the church of God. Jesus said that all things which belong to him, belong to God also. *“And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them”* (John 17:10).

There are several other designations for the church, all of which simply describe the church’s relation to God and his Son. In 1 Timothy 3:15, it is called *“the house of God”* and *“the church of the living God.”* Other passages are: *“one body”* (Ephesians 2:16), *“habitation of God”* (Ephesians 2:22), *“God’s building”* (1 Corinthians 3:9), and *“temple of God”* (1 Corinthians 3:16). In several places, it is just referred to as *“the church”* or *“churches”* in a certain geographical spot or area (Acts 13:1; 1 Corinthians 16:19). In those New Testament times, there were no denominations, and so it was understood by all that these were congregations of the church that Jesus built which had been established in various places.

The modern day practice of giving the church denomination-
al names was forbidden by the apostles of Christ. When some in the church at Corinth began naming themselves after prominent gospel preachers of their day, Paul rebuked them by saying, *“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”* (1 Corinthians 1:14,15). Neither God nor Christ are glorified when this is done. The names which we have studied in the New Testament give all glory and authority to the heavenly Father and

his holy Son Jesus. On the other hand, denominational names exalt men and promote sectarianism. Peter tells us about Jesus, *“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).

Titles

“How should a minister of the gospel be addressed?”

A minister should be addressed as any other person, without accompanying titles. If his name is Bob, call him Bob. If the situation is one calling for formality, because you don't know him very well, then call him “Mister” so and so just as you would any other person in the same situation.

In our day it is common practice to give a preacher a special religious title, to call him “Reverend,” or “Father,” or “Rabbi”, and so forth. But the popular thing to do is not always the right thing to do. In this case, it should not be done, because Jesus forbids it.

People have always been the same. There were those in Jesus' own day who were fond of giving and wearing high sounding religious titles. Jesus described them in Matthew 23 as wearing special clothing which distinguished them from the run of the mill Jews. And then he said in verses 7 and 8, that they loved “*to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ: and all ye are brethren.*” This term Rabbi in the Hebrew meant “Great One.” Jesus equated it with being called “Master” or “Teacher.” This was Teacher with a capital “T”. They were using the term in an exalting sense, putting themselves on pedestals. Jesus was showing them that only one was worthy of such a title, and that was Christ himself, who had been sent down from the God of Heaven to instruct mankind. But these teachers went even farther and wore the title of God himself, as Jesus went on to say:

“And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your

Father, which is in heaven” (verse 9). Jesus was not saying that we cannot refer to our parent as our father. He was forbidding these people to wear the name as a religious title. God in Heaven is the only one who has the right to wear this name in a religious sense. Men are only brothers, not spiritual fathers.

Jesus concluded by saying, *“And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted”* (verse 12). Here is the key to the passage. These titles exalt one man above his peers spiritually. The same is true of the title “Reverend” today. It means “worthy of reverence, or fear.” No man is worthy of religious reverence, but God only. The word is used once in the Bible where it says of God, *“Holy and reverend is his name”* (Psalm 111:9). It is wrong and in direct violation of the teaching of Christ for one to wear such a title or to call someone by it.

The origin of this practice of dubbing preachers with high titles in the church started in the centuries after Christ. It arose out of the struggle to form a special priest class in the church. Originally, all Christians were called “priests” of God (1 Peter 2:5). All were ministers of God and brothers one of another. They had different offices, or functions, in the church, but no special priest class separated them from one another. The modern emergence of the clergy-laity system in the church was unknown then. It was only when men departed from the teaching of God’s word and began building their own religious systems that the practice of exalting men with flattering titles and authorities sprang up in the churches. Today, people need to get back to Christ and his word and start exalting him again as their only head instead of one another.

Human Wisdom

“Are people with higher education better able to understand the Bible than people with ordinary education?”

Not necessarily. This is not to discredit the value or importance of obtaining a better education in life. However, the ability to understand God’s word is not restricted to the educated. In fact, under some circumstances, it is more difficult for highly educated people to understand the word of God. The reason for this is that some have a tendency to elevate man’s wisdom above that of God. Human wisdom and knowledge is constantly in flux, changing all the time with the discovery of new facts. If the seeker of knowledge can remain humble, he will be able to understand God’s word as well as any. On the other hand, if he begins to think too highly of man’s wisdom so that he becomes puffed up, it can blind him to religious truth.

Humility Necessary

A good illustration of this truth is found in the Bible. Most are acquainted with the fact that the Greeks were in their time among the greatest philosophers. They had inquiring minds and were constantly probing into the mysteries of life and of man. Some of the greatest names in philosophy come down to us from Greek culture. However, when the apostles began to preach to the Greeks the Lord Jesus Christ, many of the philosophers of the day laughed them to scorn. Paul said that *“the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified...unto the Greeks foolishness”* (1 Corinthians 1:22,23). What was the problem with these philosophers? They were highly educated men, many devoting all their time to seeking to understand the purpose of

life, but when the wonderful news of Jesus Christ dying for their sins was preached to them, they found it ridiculous.

The apostle in this chapter explains that the problem was that they were worldly wise, wise in their own sight, but blinded to religious truth because of an exalted opinion of their own wisdom. They could not understand God's wisdom because it did not correspond with their own ideas as to how things should be. They could not accept the idea of a human sacrifice for the sins of others. However, they could accept animal sacrifices to their own gods and this did not clash with their system of wisdom. Paul said of them, "*Where is the wise, where is the scribe: where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe*" (1 Corinthians 1:20,21).

Human Wisdom Failed to Find God

Despite all those centuries of accumulated wisdom, the Greeks had never discovered the true God. All their efforts to find God were futile. It took the coming of Jesus Christ into the world to declare the nature of God to men. And when he came and died for their sins, they rejected the true wisdom of God which he brought down from Heaven. All because they could not accept the idea of God's Son being crucified for them, which was contrary to their preconceived views of God. This was a case of their education getting in the way of truth so that they could not believe. The world by its own wisdom did not know God, but it pleased God to choose the preaching of a crucified Savior in order to save them.

Of course, not all the Greeks rejected Jesus, because many

churches were planted throughout their territories. However, it was unfortunate that many of their wise men and scholars never came to know the Lord. Paul said of them, "*For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called*" (1 Corinthians 1:26).

Feelings

“Is God as concerned about how a man feels as he is about what he does?”

He certainly is! The way a person thinks and feels in his heart is very important to God. It is from the heart that good and evil acts originate before they are translated into outward action. Before we give to help someone in need, mercy and pity first are felt in our heart, motivating us to take action. Before a person steals, curses, assaults someone, or commits adultery, these acts are first conceived in the mind before being committed. The thought comes first, then the deed. This is why Jesus taught that to lust in the heart is equal to committing the sin. *“But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart”* (Matthew 5:28).

A Change of Heart Required

The entire gospel system is based upon converting the heart of man from evil to good. Before the outward man will clean up his ways, the heart of the man first must be purified. This is accomplished through faith in Christ. As Peter explained it, God makes it possible through *“purifying their hearts by faith”* (Acts 15:9). It is because of the fact that the heart of man must change from evil to purity that Christ placed repentance of sin as a condition of salvation. To repent means to “have another mind.” Man’s mind or heart has sinful attitudes which must be purged from the man before he can be acceptable to God.

Paul explains that people are *“alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works”* (Colossians 1:21). When Noah got off

the ark, after God had just finished destroying all of mankind except Noah's family, God told Noah that "*the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*" (Genesis 8:21). The reason man is an enemy of God who made him is that the imagination of his heart is evil.

The truth that God is very much concerned with attitudes and thoughts of the mind as well as outward acts is found in the commandments on Christian living laid down by the apostles of Christ. For instance, Paul listed among the works of the flesh which condemn men such things as "*lasciviousness (a dirty mind) ...hatred...envyings...*" (Galatians 5:19-21). On the other hand, he also lists in this passage such qualities as "*love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, and meekness*" as fruit of the Spirit which lead us to eternal life (verses 22,23). Most of these are inward attitudes of mind which regulate the outward conduct of a person into peaceable channels.

Obedience from the Heart

Another proof that the inward feelings of the heart are very important to God is that all outward acts of obedience to God are acceptable to him only if they are done from the heart. Paul, in describing how the Romans had become Christians by being buried with Christ in baptism, said, "*Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered unto you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness*" (Romans 6:17,18). They had been freed from sin when they were baptized only because they had obeyed the command to be baptized from their hearts. No one had compelled them to do it. They did it willingly. As a result, God freed them from their sins. Yes, God is very much concerned with the inward feelings and attitudes of the heart!

Prayer

“Is prayer conditional?”

There is a popular notion that prayer is unconditional. It is the idea that God will hear and answer prayer under all circumstances, at any time, and regardless of the spiritual condition of the person praying. It is believed that prayer is a natural right of all people and that God is obligated to grant any and all requests.

But just a casual search of the Scriptures will reveal that this is not true and that prayer is definitely conditional. In the first place, God is not obligated to answer a prayer. It is a privilege which God grants to some under certain conditions. Mankind lost the right to commune with God in the beginning because of sin. All sinners have lost the right to God's ear. The reason they have is because they will not permit God the right to their ear. If we do not hear God, God will not hear us.

Must Hear God

The blind man whom Jesus healed spoke a great truth that was common knowledge to his hearers, who were Jews who knew the Old Testament Scriptures well, when he said, *“Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth”* (John 9:31). Notice that God does not hear those who actively practice sin. His ears are not open to their requests, and he will not answer their petitions. But God will hear a man under two conditions: (1) if he is a worshipper of God, and (2) if he does God's will. These two great conditions will stand until the end of the world as prerequisites to getting God's attention.

This truth is taught in many places in God's word. The apos-

tle Peter stated it when he said, *“For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil”* (1 Peter 3:12). What did he say? The same thing that the blind man said, that God answers the prayers of those who worship and obey him, but not of those who do not, for he is against them.

The apostle John said the same thing in this way: *“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight”* (1 John 3:22). Here, the reason John gave that God was granting those Christians’ requests was that they were keeping his commandments and doing things pleasing in his sight. The first condition of prayer, then, is that we be in a proper relationship with God as obedient children. He hears only the prayers of his children, not of sinners.

Prayer According to God’s Will

Now, suppose I am in this relationship with God. Prayer is still conditional at this point. For instance, I cannot ask for anything that is contrary to God’s will. *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will,”* the apostle John said, *“he heareth us. And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him”* (1 John 5:14,15). Sometimes people ask for things contrary to God’s will, which are sinful or not good for them. They need not expect to receive those things.

Pray in Faith

But suppose I am in a proper relationship to God, and am asking for the right things, there remains yet one more condition: I must ask believing that God will give me what I ask for. Many

are hesitant and fearful that they will not receive what they want, but they go ahead and ask anyway, hoping that, if God should happen to hear, he might accidentally kick a crumb in their direction. James says that Christians should have confidence that God will grant their requests and ask in full faith that they shall receive. *“But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord”* (James 1:6,7).

Yes, the answer to prayer does have some conditions: (1) We must hear God if we expect him to hear us. (2) We must be worshippers of God and have a relationship with him as our Father. (3) We must ask for things according to his will and that are lawful and right; and (4) We must ask in faith, not doubting. If we approach God under these conditions, he will gladly and mercifully answer our prayers without fail.

Live Again

“What proof is there that we can live again?”

The proof can be found in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although people since ancient times have entertained the hope of another life, it took Christ to prove it as a reality. There is in the heart of every man and woman a dread of this life ending. Everyone knows that it is coming sooner or later. Almost every day we learn of neighbors in our community leaving this world, one or more at a time. Some of these we have only vaguely heard of, others we know personally. And then it begins to strike closer to home until, finally, death claims those who are close and dear to us: a father, mother, brother, sister, husband or wife, or even children. We weep and mourn our loss and then ask ourselves, “Will we ever see them again?”

At last, the day arrives when it is our turn to die. Instead of our reading about others in our community passing away, now neighbors and strangers will be reading about us in the obituary column. What crosses a dying man or woman’s mind about that which may lie on the other side of death? Some pass from this world in hope. Others sadly depart thinking that this is the end and that they shall never live again. It depends upon whether or not they have embraced the hope of the gospel.

To those who believe the Bible, death is not such a great mystery. They are assured that they shall live again. They base their hope on the historical fact that once a man named Jesus came out of the grave alive after lying in it dead for three days. He then showed himself to many witnesses, chosen beforehand for this very purpose. He remained with these witnesses forty days, and afterward they watched him ascend up into a cloud and proceed

heavenward in it while angels stood by and announced to the witnesses that this same Jesus shall some day be returning again (Acts 1:9-11).

Jesus Has Conquered the Grave

Even earlier than this, before he was crucified and conquered the grave, Jesus personally raised dead men from the grave to demonstrate his power over death. Lazarus had been dead for four days when Jesus arrived. Jesus assured Lazarus' sister Martha, "*Thy brother shall rise again...I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*" (John 11:23,25). Proceeding on to the grave, he stood in front of it and commanded, "*Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, loose him and let him go*" (verses 43,44). He did all this in the presence of many witnesses.

Of the resurrection of Jesus, the apostle Paul lists the people who saw him after he had come out of the grave. He said that Jesus "*rose again the third day according to the Scriptures; And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; after that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time*" (1 Corinthians 15:4-8).

When we believe this good news today, and then fashion our lives in obedience to our Savior who conquered the grave, God forgives us of all our sins. We stand justified in the sight of God, and the Lord promises to give us eternal life when Christ comes

again. As John assures us, *“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God”* (1 John 5:13).

Paradise

“What did Jesus mean when he told the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43, ‘Verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in paradise’?”

The word “Paradise” is traced by scholars to the Persian language, and by some to the Armenian. The Persian word meant, “A grand enclosure or preserve, a hunting ground” (Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon).

The word passed into the Hebrew language where it came to mean “a garden, pleasure-ground; grove, park.” From this beautiful definition we conjure up in our English tongue visions of a lovely, park-like region, lush with vegetation, peaceful and delightful. But, in order to understand what Jesus meant by using this word, we need to determine where he went that day. Remember, he told the thief that *“To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”*

Where did Christ go that day? He didn’t go anywhere, neither did the thief, but to a tomb. That very day they both died. Jesus was suspended on the cross all day and finally gave up his spirit. That evening, he was buried in Joseph of Arimathea’s tomb. On the same day, the thief to whom he addressed these words also died.

By no stretch of the imagination could we say that the horrible pain they endured that day was paradise for Jesus and the thief. Neither could we call the tomb itself a paradise. But we can be assured that Jesus did not lie to the thief. They both went to paradise just as Christ said they would.

Christ Went to “Hades”

Where did Christ go? If we can find from other Scriptures where he went, there is where Paradise is. The Scriptures do tell us where the Lord spent his time while his body lay in the grave. In Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after Christ’s crucifixion, and just ten days after the Lord ascended alive and bodily back to Heaven, this apostle of Christ tells us where Christ’s soul was during the three days in question. He quotes the prophet David who in one of his psalms had pictured Christ as saying to God, *“Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption”* (Acts 2:26,27).

Notice that Christ is rejoicing in two things: (1) His soul would not be left in “hell,” (2) and his flesh also would rest in hope because he would not be seeing corruption. The term “corruption” refers to his flesh not decaying while in the grave. But what is important here to the question we are studying is that Christ was described as being in “hell” while his flesh rested in the grave.

Some may be surprised that the Bible speaks of Christ as going to “hell.” What we need to understand is that the King James Version of the Bible translates two different words from the Greek with the same English word “hell”. The Greek word in this passage is “Hades,” which means “the unseen”. In some other passages the King James translators translated “Gehenna” with the same English word “hell.” These particular passages refer to the eternal place of punishment. In order to learn which word is being used in these various passages, use a concordance or a translation of the Scriptures which will show which passages

are translating “Hades” (the unseen state) and which “Gehenna” (the place of eternal punishment).

Paradise Awaits the Righteous

All the dead go to Hades. From a story Christ tells in Luke 16:19-31, we learn that Hades is divided into two compartments, and that a “great gulf” is fixed preventing the spirits of the dead from passing to either side (verse 26). On one side of Hades there is torment. *“The rich man in hell (Hades), lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom”* (verse 23). On the other side, Christ shows the beggar *“in Abraham’s bosom,”* and quotes Abraham as saying to the tormented rich man, *“Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; now he is comforted and thou art tormented”* (verse 25).

Observe that there was “comfort” where Abraham and the beggar were. Notice also that Abraham said that the beggar was receiving “good things” while the rich man was being tormented in the flame on his side of the gulf. From this intriguing and highly informative picture of the afterworld of the dead, we get a glimpse of what Hades is like.

Since Christ spent his three days of death in Hades, and since there is a place of comfort there where good things are to be enjoyed by the righteous, we conclude that this must be the paradise of which Jesus spoke. When he and the thief died, they went there the same day together, just as Jesus had promised him while they were being crucified.

Few Saved

“Will many be saved?”

The answer to this question is one of the most tragic in the world. Jesus plainly taught that few shall be saved. He said, *“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).

The fact that a typical reaction to these words of Jesus is one of incredulity illustrates why few will enter into heaven. Most people do not really believe what Jesus says on this matter. This shows how desperately far many have drifted from God. It is common to hear people respond to Jesus’ statement by saying, “I just cannot accept that.”

We must believe Christ. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It will profit us to see some examples from God’s dealings with men in the past in order for us to understand that, in every age, the few were spared.

Eight Saved from the Flood

First, there is the example of the people in the time of Noah. Noah walked among the people as a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). Then, God’s longsuffering toward that sinful world came to an end. He promised to bring a great flood to destroy the wicked people. He commanded Noah and his family to enter the ark, and then flooded the entire world, snuffing out all human and animal life which had not entered the ark. The tragic fact is that, out of all the people living on the earth at that time, only eight

people were saved. Peter said, "*wherein few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water*" (1 Peter 3:20).

Three Saved in Sodom

Our next example of few being spared is that of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Because these cities were so wicked, God sent messengers to warn Lot, the one righteous man in Sodom, to flee from the city. Only Lot and his two daughters escaped. Even his wife disobeyed God and was turned into a pillar of salt as the cities were rained upon with fire and brimstone from heaven. (Genesis 19).

Two Entered the Promised Land

Another example is that of the Israelites who escaped from slavery in Egypt. Because of their sinfulness and unbelief while in the wilderness, God caused that entire generation to wander in the desert for forty years until they all died off, leaving only their children to enter the promised land. Only two of the original Israelites, Joshua and Caleb, were counted worthy because of their faith to enter the land. Think of it! Two men out of hundreds of thousands! When we consider the fact that Canaan was a type of heaven available to us today, it is a sobering thing to think about. Jesus said that few will enter into eternal life.

These Examples a Warning to Us

Why did all those people miss out on God's blessings? The writer of the book of Hebrews explains that it was due to their unbelief which produced sinfulness. He said, "*So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief*" (Hebrews 3:19). The apostle Paul uses these examples of the wrath of God for sin to caution us to be prepared and not to think that we are not subject

to the same destruction for sin. He said, “*Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall*” (1 Corinthians 10:11,12).

We today need to take seriously the warning of Jesus and his apostles that few will be saved in our time and increase our personal struggle with sin in our life. We need to flee to Christ for forgiveness through his blood to prepare ourselves for his coming so that we may enter into the narrow way that leads to life, and not be counted with those in the broad way that leads to destruction.

Heaven Offered to All

“Is Heaven promised to all of Christ’s followers, or to just a chosen number?”

Yes, Heaven is the common hope of all of Christ’s followers. Some have tried to rob Christians of this hope down through the years. They have tried to deny a hope of an eternal home in Heaven. They have said that Heaven was not promised to all of God’s people, but to only a select number. Others scoff at the idea of a life somewhere else than on this earth, and they are hoping that they will get to live on earth in the resurrection. Still others have advanced the idea that there are various places of rewards to different disciples, depending on the merit of their works.

But none of these views are Scriptural, not having been advanced by either Christ or his apostles. One of the plainest teachings in the New Testament is the eternal home above for the saved, and that this material universe will pass away at Christ’s coming.

Christ Pointed Men to Heaven

From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus began pointing men to Heaven. He said in his famous sermon on the Mount, *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will be your heart also”* (Matthew 6:19-21). Here, Jesus plainly contrasted Heaven and earth. He told men to lay up their treasures in Heaven. He

showed that this earth is corruptible, subject to decay, but Heaven is not.

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus told his disciples, *“In my Father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:2,3). Jesus said that, in his absence, he will be busy preparing a place for his disciples in the house of his Father. He said he is coming back some day to take his disciples there. But where did he go? He went to Heaven. Mark tells us that *“he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God”* (Mark 16:19).

Since Christ will come back some day to take his disciples to where he is, and he is now in Heaven, Heaven is where they will be going.

The apostle Peter said that Christians have been born again to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Peter 1:3). But what was this living hope to which they had been born again? It is described in the next verse as *“an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you”* (verse 4). Notice, this hope is of an inheritance which is reserved in Heaven for his people.

The apostle Paul told Christians to *“seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Colossians 3:1,2). Those who are hoping to live on this earth again are setting their affections on the wrong things. Paul said to seek those things above, not things on the earth.

There Is Only One Hope

There is only one hope, not many hopes, for God's people. Paul said to Christians that they had been called "*in one hope of your calling*" (Ephesians 4:4). That hope is one of a grand resurrection from the graves to eternal life in a place called Heaven. On the day that Christ comes again, this earth and the heavens which house it shall pass away. "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*" (2 Peter 3:10). At that time, only two dwelling places will be available to us: Heaven or Hell. It is up to us to choose which one we want. We make that choice now by either obeying or rejecting the Son of God and the gospel he brought down from Heaven.

True Church Visible

“Is the true church visible?”

It is sometimes suggested that we cannot know the true church now, but that it shall be revealed when Christ comes again. Meanwhile, its members are scattered incognito throughout the various denominations.

When we look into the Bible, we find that the Lord’s church is very much visible. For instance, most of the letters of the New Testament were written by inspired men of God to visible churches identified as belonging to Christ. Paul wrote 1 and 2 Corinthians to *“the church of God which is at Corinth”* (1 Corinthians 1:2). When he wrote to the church in Rome, he sent specific greetings from other congregations of Christ. He said, *“The churches of Christ salute you”* (Romans 16:16). When he wrote the Galatian letter, he addressed it *“unto the churches of Galatia”* (Galatians 1:2). The apostle John sent the revelation letter to the *“seven churches which are in Asia”* (Revelation 1:4).

If the church which Christ built was not visible, to whom did the messengers deliver these letters? But just a casual examination of these epistles is sufficient to show any observer that they are letters written to specific persons in definite geographical locations and cities. No, the church of Christ is visible.

Any congregation of people claiming to follow Christ can be tested in the light of God’s word to find out if it is his church. The New Testament reveals the church. The church can be identified in several ways:

Terms of Entry Identify the True Church

First, it can be identified by the terms of entrance into it. This is one of the identifying marks of any organization, human or divine. Many service clubs and organizations have certain initiatory rites for getting into them. The same is true of Christ's church. The main difference is that the Lord's terms are from Heaven and involve salvation. The Bible teaches that the process of being forgiven by God, or being saved, puts one into the church. This is because the Lord "adds" the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). When the Jews on Pentecost asked what to do to be saved, Peter told them to "*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*" (Acts 2:38). Any church offering other terms of entrance into it is not the church which Christ built, no matter how much it claims to be.

Other Identifying Marks

Other visible tests for the church will be her worship, name, organization, love, and purity of life. The church we read about in the Bible was steadfast in its worship. They continued in the apostles' doctrine or teaching (Acts 2:42). The same must be true of the church today. They also continued in the prayers, fellowship, and in breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper) (Acts 2:42), which they took on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7). God's church must continue in these things today, too.

The early disciples sang praises to God, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). The church which Jesus built will be found doing these things today.

The church we read about in the Bible had a simple form of

government. Elders (also called bishops, overseers and pastors) were selected in each church according to qualifications laid down by Christ's apostles. Read these in Acts 20:28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-9. Under the oversight of the elders were deacons and members (Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:8-13).

Purity and Love

Very strong evidences of Christ's church are its purity of life and the members' love for one another and mankind in general. Christ gave himself to "*purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*" (Titus 2:14). No matter how much a person may claim to be a Christian, he is not a faithful member of Christ's church who does not live a pure life full of doing good to others. Christ also said, "*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*" (1 John 13:35). Notice that all men shall know that you are Christ's disciples if you do these things. If the church is not visible by these tests, why did Jesus say that men would know we were his church by them? Definitely, the true church is very much visible in the world.

God's House

“Is a church building or a temple really God's house?”

A very popular idea in our time is that church buildings are holy places where God lives. Special sanctity is attached to a house of worship. People are taught to enter such a place quietly and with reverence. Some have even attached special religious significance to the furniture inside, and people are asked to kneel at certain spots.

The New Testament Scriptures teach us that there is no geographical location or a material building in this world in our time that is a holy place where God lives. A man's house where he lives is just as holy as a church building. There is no more sanctity to a temple than there is to a grocery store.

I make these statements not to be irreverent but to illustrate a great truth which Jesus himself taught while speaking to a woman of Samaria. In the Old Testament, God had Solomon build a house of worship in Jerusalem called a “Temple.” For God's own purposes, this was “God's house” for several hundred years, and Jerusalem was God's city. God did sanctify these places for the Jews. But even Solomon himself, who built the Temple, told the people that it could not really contain God. Stephen quoted Solomon's words when he told the Jews, *“But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit, the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool; what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or, what is the place of my rest? Hath not my hand made all these things?”* (Acts 7:47-50). Notice, he said that *“God dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”*

A New Kind of Worship

The Samaritan woman had been brought up to believe that God lived in a certain mountain in Samaria. She told Jesus, "*Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship*" (John 4:20). Jesus replied to her, "*Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father...But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him*" (John 4:21,23).

Jesus was telling the Samaritan woman that the idea of special holy mountains, cities, and temples was going to be a thing of the past in the worship he was bringing into the world. He called this new kind of religious service worship "*in spirit and in truth.*" In this worship, no mountain, city, or building was going to be counted as holy. People would no longer be going to such places to worship God.

God Dwells in People Not Houses

When Christ arose from the grave, he sent his apostles into the world and ascended back to Heaven. It was then that he established this new kind of worship. The early Christians met in all kinds of places. They met in homes as much as in any public building. They had communion with God wherever they chose to gather, because Jesus had earlier said, "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" (Matthew 18:20).

Today, God dwells in his people, not in holy buildings. The place where these people meet to worship God is not important. It might be in a public hall, a private residence, a rented store

building, or a building of their own construction. But these places are not what is holy, but the people themselves in whom God walks are holy. As Paul explained to the Corinthian church, *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”* (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Judged by Words

“Is it true that we shall be judged by our words?”

Yes, it is true. That’s not the only way that we shall be judged, of course, but it is one factor which will determine where we shall spend eternity. Jesus said, *“But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned”* (Matthew 12:36,37)

One of the greatest gifts we have received from God is the ability to speak. Nothing has brought more joy or caused more pain in the world. The person who said, “Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me” didn’t know what he was talking about. Words have done more hurt to the human family than all sickness or physical pain. Talk is not cheap. How can something be cheap that has the power to wreak so much destruction? Words have started wars, broken homes, separated friends, and even torn asunder the church for which Jesus died. James tells us, *“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his own tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain”* (James 1:26). Yes, the tongue may be a little member, but it boasts great things (James 3:5).

Words Reveal the Heart

It is little wonder that Jesus speaks to us about the terrible responsibility of words. The state of a man’s heart can be seen through the words that he speaks. Jesus said, *“For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an*

evil man out of the evil treasure bringing forth evil things” (Matthew 12:34,45). Jesus warned that we must render account to God for every idle word. Many watch what they say in public, but in private conversation they let down their guard and become coarse and profane. Many a man is a model of charm and courtesy in public where he knows that he is being observed, but in the privacy of his home becomes a dreadful example of sarcasm, complaint, and bitter criticism of others. In times of anger, people sometimes say things that they would not have said while in control of themselves. Unfortunately, words often leave wounds that not even time can cure, and create barriers between people. Once the hurting word is spoken, nothing can cause it to return as it proceeds on its destructive course.

Season Speech with Salt

May God help us to be more careful of what we say and how we say it. Paul exhorts Christians, *“Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man”* (Colossians 4:6). James said of the tongue, *“Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God”* (James 3:9). Such inconsistency of the tongue is inexcusable and unnatural. A spring of water, says James, can not transgress the law of its nature by bringing forth sweet and bitter water at the same time. A fruit tree can only bear fruit according to its kind. It is completely out of order to claim to be a follower of God and praise him while, with the same mouth, spewing out curses upon our fellow man. This is hypocrisy!

Every one at one time or other has sinned with his or her tongue, whether by lying, unclean speech, or harsh and unjust words. These idle words will be brought up against us in the

judgment day — unless the sin is removed now in this life through the blood of Christ. Those who turn to Christ will have their sins washed away by his blood and these words will not be remembered against us by God on that day. The Lord promises, *“Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more”* (Hebrews 8:12).

Lost Again

“Can a saved person be lost again?”

One of the most misleading theories about salvation is the idea that, once a person is saved, he can never be lost again. This idea no doubt is comforting to believe, but the self-deceiving element in it actually encourages a return to sin. The reason for this is that many who embrace the teaching feel so secure in their belief that sin cannot be fatal to them that they no longer fear the destructive power of sin in their lives. They become confident that, somehow, God will overlook the sin and save them anyway. I have personally met several people of this belief who were living ungodly lives but felt God would not cast them off for their sins.

The truth is that God will not save any man in his sins, whether he be Christian or non-Christian. Paul called the Christians in Rome “saints” (Romans 1:7), and then cautioned them not to live in sin anymore. *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof”* (Romans 6:12). He also said, *“For the wages of sin is death”* (Romans 6:23). If it were not possible for those Christians to allow sin to reign in their mortal bodies and bring death to them, he would not have warned them against the possibility as he did.

We Must Not Live in Sin

A righteous man is one who lives righteously. An unrighteous man is one who lives ungodly. It is as simple as that. If we live as God wants us to, we belong to God. However, if we live as the devil wants, we belong to the devil. The apostle John made this quite clear when he wrote to the early Christians these words:

“Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning” (1 John 3:7,8). Practically everyone has known someone who once lived a faithful life for Christ, rejoicing in the Lord and doing all within his power to please God. Then, gradually, for some reason this person’s love grew cold. He began forsaking the worship services. In time, he quit the church entirely and drifted back into his old way of life. The time came when he was living the same sinful life he did before becoming a Christian. According to the apostle John’s teaching, while he was “doing righteousness” he was righteous. He belonged to God. When he went back into sin, he gave his life back to the devil.

We Have Free Choice

God will not save us contrary to our will. We have the free choice to follow Christ before and after being saved. This is obvious from the Hebrew writer’s words to Christians: *“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God”* (Hebrews 3:12). Notice that he said that saved people could depart from the Living God by developing an *“evil heart of unbelief.”* Therefore, a believer can cease believing and leave Christ. What causes him to do this is the deceitfulness of sin, which causes a hardening of the heart. For this reason, the writer urges the Christians to *“exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin”* (verse 13). Sin promises us much and deceives us, luring us into practicing it again. However, each sin deliberately committed helps to erect a wall around our heart against God, described as a *“hardening of the heart.”*

If we do not repent of our sin, we can become so hardened to things spiritual that we cannot even be restored to repentance again. The Hebrew writer says that it can become impossible *“if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing that they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame”* (Hebrews 6:4-6).

The Shame of Falling Away

A fallen away Christian's condition is so shameful that the apostle Peter compares him to a hog washed clean only to return to her wallowing in the mire, and to a dog returning again to eat his own vomit (2 Peter 2:22). These are people who Peter said *“had escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome”* (verse 20). He said that *“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”* (verse 21).

Some have contended that these people will still be saved because, once God saves a man, it is for eternity. They say that God will not destroy this person, but will somehow give him another chance, and that he will repent before he dies in his sin. But the Bible does not teach this idea. Christ plainly taught that Christians are like branches in him, the true vine. If they bring forth fruit, God cleanses them (John 15:1,2), but if they become fruitless branches, they will be taken away and burned. He warned, *“Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away”* (John 15:2). And again, *“If a man abide 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”* (verse 6).

Headquarters of the Church of Christ

“Where are the headquarters of the Church of Christ?”

Many people are amazed when they hear that the Church of Christ does not have an earthly headquarters. Nowadays, it is so common for churches to have a central office of authority that the idea of no ecclesiastical headquarters is almost unheard of. I have been asked on occasions, “How do you manage to carry on the business of the church without a headquarters?” It is hard for many to understand how unity of faith and practice can be achieved among churches of Christ without this central authority.

Actually, we do have a headquarters, but it is not on earth. If the headquarters were on earth, then the church would be earthly. The headquarters are where the head is. Take any big business with branch offices scattered across the country and you will find a president or chairman or at least a group of men stationed at some particular place heading it up. Any organization must have a directing head in order to preserve unity of purpose and to keep the body functioning smoothly to forward its aims.

The Church’s Head Is in Heaven

The same is true of Christ’s church. According to the Bible, the single, solitary, and only head of the Lord’s church is Christ himself. God put “*all things under his feet and gave him to be the head over all things to the church*” (Ephesians 1:22,23). God is a jealous God. He will not let any man share this headship with his Son, Jesus. The passage says he gave Christ to be head over

all things to the church. He did not let Christ have a big piece and someone else a little piece of this headship. God has decreed that Christ be the head and that he have all the preeminence in the church (Colossians 1:18). Any church with a human head on earth along with, or besides Christ, has not been established by God. It is a fearful thing to wrest from the Lord Jesus his rightful position of preeminence as the commander-in-chief of his people — the great and sole president of the church which he purchased with his own blood. It was not until five centuries after Jesus built his church that a shameful power struggle among church leaders set up a human being on earth blasphemously claiming to be the head over the church.

The headquarters of Christ's church are in Heaven where Jesus the head now is. Mark tells us, "*So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God*" (Mark 16:19). Since the church's head is in Heaven, it follows that this is an heavenly organization receiving its orders from Heaven, destined for that place, and merely passing through this earth as pilgrims on their way to an eternal home above. And this is exactly what the Bibles teaches. Paul told the church of Christ in Philippi, "*For our conversation is in heaven*" (Philippians 3:21). The word "conversation" is in another English version translated "citizenship." This is an accurate definition of the word. Paul was merely pointing out that the citizenship of the church is not on this earth, but in Heaven where the head, Christ, is. No wonder when Christ was announcing his intention of building the church he also called it the "*kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 16:18,19).

How Christ Directs His Church

How does Christ direct and regulate his church while he is in

Heaven? He does this through his word, the New Testament. It contains the last will and testament of Christ for his people. Delivered by the Lord through inspired apostles and teachers, this gospel holds sway in the lives of Christ's subjects. The Lord controls and guides his church by medium of this revelation from Heaven. It contains the faith once delivered to the saints and is a complete guide in their lives. Although it is true that the church's head is unseen, nevertheless he is very much alive and in control in their lives as they walk by faith and do his holy will. He is their king while they sojourn through this world homeward bound. Paul told Christians, "*Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Colossians 3:1,2).

Today, churches of Christ follow this divine pattern of having Christ as their only head and his word as their guide to eternal life. They will have no earthly headquarters, because to do so is to substitute an inferior headship for the great Savior and head of the church appointed by God, his own Son Jesus Christ.

Rebaptism

“If a person is not satisfied with his baptism, should he be baptized again?”

Some people begin to wonder about their baptism years after it was performed. A great deal of confusion about the act itself in the minds of people nowadays may be responsible for these feelings of anxiety over their baptism. But really, the question should not be “Am I satisfied with my baptism?” but should be phrased “Is God satisfied with it?”

There Is One Baptism

There is only one baptism which God gave. Paul said so in Ephesians 4:5. He said that there is “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism.*” But he is talking about the baptism which Jesus Christ commanded, not just any baptism. If a person has not submitted to that baptism, he definitely should be baptized again. But if he has, there would be no purpose in being rebaptized. I know of a woman who got baptized just about every time there was a revival held in her neighborhood. It was a standing joke in the community that, just as surely as there was a revival going on, this lady would be baptized again. Obviously, there was something lacking in her understanding of the purpose and design that God has for the act which constitutes baptism.

There are some religious groups today which require a person to be baptized again if he wants to enter into their denomination. Even if the person has previously been baptized properly, he still has to be rebaptized by one of this group’s ministers, to be accepted. Apparently it is harder to get into their denomination than it is to be saved. This is a sectarian concept of baptism.

But the word of God does teach that we should be baptized again if we have failed to obey Jesus' baptism the first time. We have the example in the book of Acts of some men in Ephesus who had to be baptized again. They had previously submitted to John the baptist's baptism, but when Paul told them of Christ's baptism, they were baptized again in the name of Christ (Acts 19:1-7). Although John's baptism had been valid prior to the cross, the baptism of Christ replaced it after the cross, having the promise both of the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Ghost.

How can we know if we have had the correct baptism performed on us? We must go to the words of Christ to see. If we were baptized with the one baptism described in his word, then there is no sense in being baptized again. If we were not, then it will be urgent for us to obey Christ properly.

An Immersion in Water

Briefly, the baptism Christ commanded is an immersion in water. The word "baptized" in the Greek New Testament literally means "dip, plunge, immerse". The idea of sprinkling or pouring was never conveyed by the word. These are modern inventions and were not practiced for several centuries after Christ. They are not authorized in God's word. Christ did not give them, therefore they have no part in the one baptism described in the Scriptures. The Bible shows that baptism is a **burial**. *"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 6:4). It is always pictured as being performed by the baptizer and the baptized going down together into the water and coming up out of the water (Matthew 3:16; Acts 8:38,39)

Only for Believers

Christ's baptism is performed only upon believers, not upon infants who are incapable of having faith. Jesus said, "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved*" (Mark 16:16). Infants and small children are not able to grasp the concepts of faith due to their undeveloped mental capacity. Baptizing them would be an empty act, since baptism is an act of faith on the part of the one being baptized. Besides, little children are not held accountable. Because of their innocent and trusting nature, Jesus used them as an example for us adults, saying that we must become as little children or we shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:3).

For Remission of Sins

Christ's baptism is for the remission of sins. Peter said that it was for this purpose when the Jews on Pentecost asked him what to do to be saved: "*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*" (Acts 2:38) Some today immerse their candidates for baptism, but do not immerse them for the remission of sins. These rob the purpose for which Christ commanded baptism. If a person does not submit to baptism for the remission of sins, he has not been baptized with the baptism which Christ commanded. Also, this baptism is to be done "*in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,*" according to Jesus (Matthew 28:19).

If your baptism satisfied these divine requirements, you properly obeyed Christ. God is satisfied with your baptism, therefore you should be also. On the other hand, if your baptism was not done when you were old enough to believe for yourself

in Jesus Christ, if it was not an immersion in water, and if it was not for the remission or forgiveness of sins, you should be baptized again as soon as possible.

Kingdom of God

“What do the terms ‘Kingdom of God’ and ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ refer to?”

Both John the baptist and Jesus used these expressions often, referring to the church which Christ was to establish. Daniel the prophet had foretold that God was going to set up a kingdom some time during the days of the Roman kings. Daniel lived several hundred years before Christ and interpreted king Nebuchadnezzar’s dream to that effect. He showed the king that the dream represented four successive world powers, starting with Nebuchadnezzar’s own Babylonian Empire and culminating with the Roman Empire. Then he said of this fourth world power of Rome: *“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever”* (Daniel 2:44).

Another prophet, Isaiah, foretold that Jesus Christ would be the king of God’s kingdom. He wrote: *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end”* (Isaiah 9:6,7). Notice that both Daniel and Isaiah said that this mighty God’s kingdom would be eternal, standing forever. Isaiah pointed out that the king of this kingdom would be a *“son born”*. At the same time, he was also called the *“mighty God”*. Only one person fulfills both these requirements — Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Christ's Church Is the Kingdom

The reason we know that this kingdom meant the church which Jesus built is that: (1) Christ and the apostles called the church the kingdom of heaven and of God; (2) Christ is reigning as king of the church right now; therefore it is that prophesied kingdom which was to be set up by God.

Just as Daniel had foretold, it was in the days of the Roman emperors that Christ built his church. First, John the baptist appeared on the scene in the wilderness of Judaea crying, "*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*" (Matthew 3:2). After John was put in prison, Jesus continued where John left off, saying, "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel*" (Mark 1:15). Notice that he said that the "*time is fulfilled.*" This was the time in which Daniel had prophesied that Christ would build his kingdom. Later, Jesus told his apostles that the kingdom was going to be set up in their lifetime with power: "*Verily, I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power*" (Mark 9:1).

When the Kingdom Came

Did the church come with power? Indeed it did. After his resurrection, Christ sent his apostles into the city of Jerusalem to await the coming of the Holy Ghost which would clothe them with power with which to establish his kingdom. He said, "*And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high*" (Luke 24:49). The apostles obeyed his command and were waiting in Jerusalem, when, on the day of Pentecost, a sound like

a mighty rushing wind filled the house where they were sitting, and what appeared to be divided tongues of fire sat upon each of them (Acts 2:1-3). Filled with the Holy Ghost, they were thus able to address a vast multitude of Jews who were assembled there for the Jewish feast day of Pentecost so that all heard the message in their own languages. All these Jews, being from many areas of the world, spoke many different languages, but with the power of God, Peter and the rest of the apostles were able to speak to them and be understood.

Peter told the people that they had killed Christ just 50 days earlier when they had caused Jesus to be executed. He proved from the Old Testament scriptures that God had made that same Jesus both Lord and Christ. The people, pricked in their heart by Peter's words, begged to know what to do to rid themselves of their great guilt. Peter told them to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). That same day, three thousand people obeyed his command for their salvation, and in this way the church came into existence. The church had come with power in the lifetime of Jesus' personal disciples just as he had said that it would. It came also during the days of the Roman kings, fulfilling the prophecy of Daniel.

During his personal ministry, Jesus often called the church the "*kingdom of heaven*." He told the disciples, "*Upon this rock I will build my church*" and then in the same breath told Peter, "*And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven*" (verses 18,19), identifying the church and the kingdom as the same thing. Peter used the keys to the kingdom when, on Pentecost day, he told the Jews what to do to get rid of their sins, opening the door for them to enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the Scriptures, the church is not only called the "*kingdom*

of heaven” but also the “*kingdom of God,*” the terms being used interchangeably from passage to passage. The reason for this is that God is the one who established the kingdom. Therefore it is of Him. It is also referred to as Christ’s kingdom because he is its King and head, and the church is subject to him. Paul told the church that God “*hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*” (Colossians 1:13).

The New Man

“What changes does God expect in a man when he becomes a Christian?”

The answer to this question ought to be obvious. However, since the beginning of the world, there have been attempts to explain away the plain teachings of God. So, let's go to the Bible to see exactly what changes God expects when a person comes to Christ. What we learn is that God expects a complete reformation in character, which is referred to as *“the new man.”*

A Rebirth

Christ referred to this change in attitudes and life as a *“new birth.”* He said, *“Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... Verily, Verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (John 3:3,5). God is the Father of this new birth, the spiritual parent doing the begetting. The water refers to a person's baptism into Christ in water. Paul said that, when we are baptized into Christ, we are buried and arise with him to walk in a *“newness of Life”* (Romans 6:3,4). In this new life, a change has been effected in the man himself.

Putting on the New Man

For instance, prior to his conversion he was an unbeliever. Now he is a believer in Christ. Formerly, he was an unrepentant sinner, now he is repentant. Before his conversion, he lived in disobedience to God and couldn't care less what God thought of his conduct. Now his life is dedicated to God's service and he is very concerned about whether or not his life is pleasing to God.

As a new creature in Christ, his standards are higher than any on earth, because God himself has set the standards for his life. God's word says, "*And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*" (Ephesians 4:24). Notice that the new life is one of "putting on the new man" and putting off the old.

New Way of Life

Some of the differences between the new and old men are these: "*Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour*" (verse 25). The old man was prone to lie if the occasion seemed to warrant it or if there was an advantage to be gained in lying. The new man does not engage in lying. Again, "*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil*" (verses 26,27). God is not commanding anger here. Rather, he means to gain control of anger and fight it down, not permitting the devil to gain a hold on us through our uncontrolled tempers. The old man was prone to venting his anger and to giving people a piece of his mind. The new man gains control of himself and masters his temper.

"*Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth*" (verse 28). Thieves who are converted to Christ make a complete turnabout. Whereas previously they stole from others, now they work and give to the needy.

"*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*" (verse 29). The old man's speech was impure. He would curse, tell unclean jokes, and speak evil of others. But the new man's speech is pure and free of filth.

“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:31,32). The old man was a brawler and a hater; the new man is tenderhearted, loving even his enemies. Yes, a great change occurs when a person comes to know God!

Chief Cornerstone

“Why is Jesus called a chief cornerstone?”

The passage alluded to is found in Ephesians 2:20, where Paul told Christians that they were *“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.”*

In order to understand this passage, we need to determine what kind of building the apostle is speaking of. Since Christ is a man and the Son of God, he obviously is not a literal stone. The word stone, then, must be a figure of speech. In some manner, Christ resembles a stone in his function. The picture of a building is set forth in the passage. In verse 21, Paul said *“In whom all the building, fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.”* So, Christ is a chief cornerstone in this building of which the apostle speaks. The building is also called a temple in the verse we have just read.

The Temple of God

In the Old Testament, God commanded Solomon to build a temple, or house for God. It was a temple or house made of stone and wood. However, in our age, God has a new kind of temple, made of living souls, Christians, called “lively” or living stones. Peter told Christians, *“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house”* (1 Peter 2:5). In this new kind of temple, the souls of men comprise the temple in which God walks. Paul said to the church in Corinth, *“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?”* (1 Corinthians 3:16). In verse 9 he tells them, *“Ye are God’s building.”* In our age, God lives and walks in Christians by his Spirit

Christians Are God's Temple Today

This explains Jesus' statement in Matthew 16. He had just come into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi when he asked his disciples, "*Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?*" (verse 13). Among the various answers, no man thought he was the promised Christ. Then Peter told Christ, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God*" (verse 16). Jesus then promised that "*Upon this rock I will build my church*" (verse 18). Notice again that the church was a spiritual temple which Jesus was going to build, not upon a material foundation, but upon the grand fact that he is the Son of God.

But this still does not explain Christ as a corner stone. The function of a corner stone in a building is to bind the walls together. In this text of the 2nd chapter of Ephesians which we are studying, the apostle is showing how Christ makes both Gentiles and Jews one people in himself. Whereas in previous ages, the Jews were a separate nation of people under God, unconnected to Gentiles, now in Christ Jesus they both form one people in the church. As the apostle Paul explained it in verse 14, "*For he is our peace, who hath made both one.*" And again in verse 16, "*And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross.*" Observe that he said that Jesus reconciles both Jew and Gentile to God in **one body**. What is this one body? It is the church of which Jesus is the builder, his spiritual temple. The same writer earlier defined this body as the church when he said that God "*gave him to be the head over all things to the church which is his body*" (Ephesians 1:22,23).

Christ Joins Jews and Gentiles

Since the church is God's temple, built by Christ, made up of

living stones which are the spirits of saved men, and these saved men are drawn from two classes of people, Jews and Gentiles, we can see how Christ is the corner stone to them. He binds the two walls of Jews and Gentiles together to form one holy spiritual temple, the church. There are to be no barriers or divisions in Christ's church. Its people are one in Him, the great cornerstone. The members have been brought to Christ by the apostles and prophets he sent out to witness to the nations that he is their Savior and King. Based on the foundation of the testimony of these apostles and prophets, with Jesus binding the whole house together at the corner, these people form one great and holy spiritual temple of God in the world.

Binding and Loosing

“What did Jesus mean when he told the apostles ‘Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven’?”

This question is on Matthew 18:18 where Jesus was speaking with all his apostles, and the same expression was used when he addressed the apostle Peter alone in Matthew 16:18,19. From these passages, we see that the apostles of Christ had authority to bind and loose things on earth which would be bound and loosed in Heaven. But exactly what would they bind and loose?

Authority to Bind and Loose Sin

First, the apostles had the authority to “bind and loose” sins. After Christ arose from the grave, he appeared to them and told them, *“Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained”* (John 20:23). Some have thought that Christ meant they would have the power to forgive sins. But this is not what he meant. This power belongs to God and Christ alone. Once, Jesus healed a palsied man and told him, *“Son, thy sins be forgiven thee”* (Mark 2:5). The Jews accused him of speaking blasphemy, saying, *“Who can forgive sins but God alone?”* (verse 7). They recognized that man does not have this authority. Jesus told them that he had said this *“that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins...”* (verse 10).

In what way could the apostles remit or retain sins? By preaching God’s terms of forgiveness. What they taught that men must do to be forgiven is binding on all generations until Christ

comes again. They were specially chosen by Christ to preach these conditions of salvation to all mankind. It was Peter and the rest of the apostles who told the Jews on Pentecost to "*Repent and be baptized... for the remission of sins*" (Acts 2:38). Jesus had said, "*Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them,*" and now Peter was telling them how to get rid of their sins. As Christ's personal ambassadors, the function of the apostles was to tell the world how to be saved, or have their sins remitted.

Power to Bind Spiritual Laws

Another facet of their binding and loosing authority was that they were commissioned personally by Christ to bind spiritual laws on God's people. When Christ was in the upper room with them on the night of his betrayal, he promised to send them the Holy Spirit by which they would speak Christ's will to mankind. He told them that the Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). He also said on the same occasion in a prayer to his Heavenly Father that the world would believe in Christ through the apostles' word (John 17:20). After the church was established on their preaching about Christ, it is said that the church "*continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine*" (Acts 2:42).

Their teaching was not their own, but Jesus Christ's. They were simply his messengers, uttering by the power of the Holy Spirit what Christ directed them to speak. One of them, the apostle John, speaking of how to tell a false teacher from a true one, gave this test: "*We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error*" (1 John 4:6). This is the same test today. A teacher of religion is from God if he hears the apostles. He is not of God if he does not. He may appear to be a per-

sonable speaker, but if he does not hear the apostles, his message is not from God, because he has rejected the Christ by rejecting the ambassadors sent by him.

One of the greatest lessons our generation needs to learn is that of following the binding and loosing authority of the apostles. Men today sit in councils and make laws for the church who simply do not have this authority. As a result, churches are moving farther and farther away from God.

Imperishable Words of Christ

“What did Jesus mean when he said that ‘heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away?’” (Luke 21:33).

Jesus meant exactly what his words say. He meant that heaven and earth were going to pass away. He also meant that his words would last forever.

Just consider this: his words have lasted some 2,000 years by now. The Bible is the most preserved book known to mankind. No document has been so widely printed and distributed as the Bible. And through the Bible the words of Christ live and work in the lives of people today. The apostle Peter also foretold the eternity of the words of Christ. He said that the word of God *“liveth and abideth for ever”* (1 Peter 1:23). He further qualified what he meant by the “word of God” when he said, *“But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you”* (verse 25). Since Jesus Christ brought the gospel into the world, and the gospel will endure forever, then Christ’s words shall last forever. Long after this world has passed from the scene, the Lord’s teachings will endure.

On one occasion, Jesus pointed out that his words will be judging men and women in the judgment day, a time yet future to us today. He said, *“He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day”* (John 12:48). Friends, we had better consider carefully these words of Christ, for they shall be the standard by which we shall be judged.

This World Will Pass Away

Many passages teach that the universe we live in will pass away. The earth where we dwell, and the great heavenly expanse visible above will disappear in a mass of flame and smoke. Peter said, "*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up*" (2 Peter 3:10).

The Hebrew writer also says of the heavens and the earth, "*They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed*" (Hebrews 1:11,12). But long after this occurs, Christ's words will go on and on and on. They have lasted two millenniums now, and shall continue until the end of time. Then they shall endure for all eternity, into that everlasting world beyond these present perishable heavens and earth.

Holy Days

“Does the Bible teach any special holy days that Christians should observe?”

The only holy days that the Bible mentions are those that were given by Moses to the Israelite nation prior to the coming of Christ. After Jesus died on the cross, was raised from the dead, and built his church, all these special days of observance were removed by him. Then, aside from the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, Christ did not establish any new feasts to be observed by Christians. An examination of the whole New Testament fails to reveal any special days being kept by the early church during the days of the apostles.

Holy Days Nailed to the Cross

There is an important reason for this amazing lack of holy days in the new religion which Christ brought into the world through the gospel. The apostle Paul, who was specially chosen by Christ to carry the word to the Gentiles, explains to us in his letters that they belonged to an old and rudimentary system of worship that had served its purpose and passed away when Christ brought a new and better worship to the world. He said that Christ *“nailed to the cross”* the law of Moses which contained such ordinances. *“Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross”* (Colossians 2:14). *“Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy-day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days”* (verse 16).

The Israelites observed many annual religious feasts which commemorated major events in the history of their nation, as well

as the weekly Sabbaths and special Sabbaths connected with holy days. Paul said they had all been taken away, along with the animal sacrifices and dietary laws, because they were simply “*a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ*” (verse 17). These things foreshadowed the coming of Jesus Christ who brought the true sacrifice for sin into the world. Since the substance, or “body,” which these things foretold had arrived, the “shadows” were now removed. To continue to cling to the shadows was to reject Jesus the substance.

An Outdated Worship

It took some time for many of the early Christians to understand this concept. The idea of sacrifices and holy days did not die easily. Paul had to reprove some of the Christians living in Galatia because they continued to cling to the old observances. Even Gentiles coming into the church were being compelled to submit to the Jewish rite of circumcision and to keep the law of Moses. Paul reprovved these practices among them when he wrote these words: “*But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain*” (Galatians 4:9-11). The Gentiles had not known God before learning of Christ. But, now that they knew God through Jesus, they were going back into the weak and rudimentary forms of worship they were accustomed to observing in the past. Many of the Pagan religions also had holy days and sacrifices as had the Jews. By adopting the observances of the law of Moses bound on them by judaizing Christians, these new gentile Christians were going backwards instead of forward in Christ.

Jesus himself had earlier told his disciples that his worship was going to be vastly different from the old, ritualistic forms of religion. He told the Samaritan woman that men would no longer go to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple as the Jews did, nor to a special holy mountain as the Samaritans were doing. He said, *“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23,24). The worship of the Jews and also of many Gentile people like the Samaritans consisted chiefly of special holy places, animal sacrifices, and holy feast days. Jesus said that this type of worship would no longer be in effect under his rule as Messiah. People would be able to approach God anywhere in the world at any place and at any time. Through their faith, they would always be on holy ground. They would not have to go to a special holy location in order to worship God. Jesus said to his disciples, *“For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20). For these reasons, after the church was established, we find the early Christians meeting together in a variety of public places and in their homes. They had no temple of their own, but they themselves formed the Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Origin of Church Holy Days

Neither were days set aside to celebrate special events of the life of Christ. The only exception was the weekly gathering on the first day of the week to remember the death of Christ for the sins of the world (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:20-34). No annual holy days were set aside to remember his death, burial and resurrection, for these things were being proclaimed daily

in their public and house to house preaching of the gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Neither was there a day set apart to remember his birth, because the story of his incarnation and birth was being taught continually by the preachers and teachers of the church, holding up Jesus before the people as the only begotten Son of God in their daily ministering of the gospel (John 3:16; Romans 1:1-4; Philippians 2:5-11).

It was not until after the apostles of Christ had passed from the scene that churches began setting aside special days to celebrate the events of Christ's life. It was during this post-apostolic period that Easter and Christmas were developed, along with various other holy days, despite the express prohibition of the apostle Paul against the church observing special days. Christ, who is the head of the church, did not institute them, and his messengers to the world, the apostles, did not authorize any. Today, the popularity of holy days among many churches indicates how far men have strayed from the purity and simplicity of the worship proclaimed in the New Testament by Christ and his apostles.

Second Coming of Christ

“Why has Jesus delayed so long in returning?”

Jesus Christ definitely promised to return a second time. His second coming will be a spectacular one. He promised to come in the clouds of heaven with great power and glory, with the trump of God and the voice of an archangel. He said that he is going to dispatch multitudes of angels in the business of lifting the dead from the graves into eternity. At that time, great shaking forces will tear the universe apart and the earth and heavens will go up in a gigantic ball of flame into extinction. Then will come the judgment, followed by the eternal world and a separation of the wicked from the righteous throughout all eternity.

How long will it be until all these things come to pass? Because so many centuries have passed since Jesus' second coming was promised, some have wondered if the Lord has delayed his return. Others doubt that he will ever come at all. The apostle Peter prophesied that some men would feel this way before the end of time. He said, *“Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation”* (2 Peter 3:3,4)

However, things have not always continued as they were from the beginning of creation. These scoffers, Peter points out, overlook the fact that God destroyed the wicked from the face of the earth once before, during the great flood in the days of Noah, *“whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished”* (2 Peter 3:6).

Peter assures us, *“But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word, are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”* (verse 7).

God is reserving this world for judgment. God has a reason for the delay, and that reason, Peter says, is that God wants to give all men opportunity to repent. He does not enjoy punishing the wicked. He wants to give men sufficient time to save their souls. *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise,”* Peter says, *“as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (verse 9). God’s great love for rebellious man is the reason for this long period of waiting for Christ to return. It is because of his tender mercy that he has granted us this grace period in which to repent in order to rid ourselves of the guilt of sin before the day of judgment arrives.

If Christ should come today, and you and I were still in our sins, our future would be very bleak. But God wants us all to escape eternal punishment through coming to his Son for forgiveness. This is why he has mercifully extended to mankind a long period of time in which to repent. During this time, he has given his Son to die for our sins and has sent out the gospel to be preached to us so that we may hear and believe.

However, Peter warns that God will not delay forever, because he has appointed a day in which he will bring the world to an end and execute judgment. *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up”* (2 Peter 3:10). Then the mercy of God shall be withdrawn and ungodly men shall begin paying for their sins.

Devil

“Is there a real personality known as the Devil? Or is this just evil personified by the term ‘devil’?”

Before we look at the Bible to find the answer to the question, we might observe in passing that practically all cultures of people, both primitive and modern, believe in evil spirits of some sort. This universal idea seems to indicate that man recognizes some supernatural, evil force outside himself at work in the world. And so, the idea of a devil loose on the earth seems to be written in the consciousness of mankind. It is true that many do not accept the belief, and scoff at the idea of a literal evil spirit at work around them invisible to the naked eye. But it is interesting to note that so many have observed forces of evil prevalent on our earth and have concluded that at least some of these are supernatural in origin.

A Real Being

One of the plainest teachings of the word of God is that there is a spiritual personality, a literal being, called the “Devil” and “Satan.” He is not just a “force,” or idea, but an active, working evil spirit with an army of evil spirits under his command. Jesus spoke of him as being a murderer from the beginning. Jesus said to some of his religious opponents, *“Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar and the father of it”* (John 8:44).

Notice, Jesus says that the Devil was the first murderer, the first liar, and the father of the lie. Words such as these can only

be said of a rational being. When we remember the story of how the serpent fooled Eve with a lie into eating forbidden fruit in the beginning, resulting in the death of the first couple on earth, we can understand how the Devil, who was speaking through the serpent's mouth, was a murderer and a liar.

We have records in the Bible of the Devil coming to talk and reason with God, and then later with Christ. In the book of Job, he is pictured coming into the assembly of the sons of God while they were presenting themselves before the Lord and slandering Job to God, saying that, if all his possessions were taken away, Job would curse God to his face (Job 1:11). In this book, God has more than one conversation with the devil over the matter. Later, when Christ first entered into his ministry, Matthew records the devil coming to tempt Jesus in the wilderness while he was fasting. The devil quotes Scriptures and tries to get Jesus to sin against his Heavenly Father, all to no avail (Matthew 4:1-11). In verse 11, Matthew said, *"Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him."*

Work of the Devil in the World

Satan's power is great in this world. So active and powerful is he that Paul refers to him as the *"god of this world"* (2 Corinthians 4:4). Jesus called him the *"prince of this world"* (John 12:31). The Jews called him the *"prince of the devils"* (Matthew 9:34). Satan is especially skilled in lying and slandering, through which he does his greatest damage in the world. He does this through the mouths of men and women, who become his unwitting operatives. This is why Jesus said that he was the *"father of the lie"* and that those who engage in it are his *"children."* He is well named, because both his Greek name "Devil" and Hebrew name "Satan" mean "deceiver" and "slanderer."

The Devil's Fate

Jesus foretells the devil's destruction. He pictures the damned being sent away into "*everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41). One of the reasons for Christ's coming again is in order to destroy the devil and his works and to free mankind from the devil's bondage (Hebrews 2:14,15).

Inspiration

“What does the word ‘inspiration’ mean when applied to the Scriptures?”

The term “inspiration” is found in 2 Timothy 3:15,16 where Paul wrote, *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God...”* The word translated from the Greek into English in the original tongue is “theopneustos”. It was a combination of two Greek words: “theos” (God) and “pneo” (breathe). The idea is that the holy Scriptures are “God-breathed”. Although they were written by men, God breathed into them the stamp of divine authority.

From this we can see that “inspiration” meant something different to the people of that day than the term does to many people today. Nowadays, the word is often used in the sense of enthusiasm, or emotional impact. They look at a beautiful bit of scenery and say that it “inspires” them. Or, they hear music and call it “inspiring”. A play or a movie is a source of “inspiration” to many. But when people use the term in this way, they are not using it as the apostle Paul did. What he meant was that the Scriptures came from God as the writers were led by the Spirit of God.

Prophets Spoke by the Spirit of God

The apostle Peter tells us of the Old Testament prophets who spoke and wrote messages from God. He said, *“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”* (2 Peter 1:21). (In

the King James version of the Bible, “Ghost” and “Spirit” are used interchangeably, so that sometimes he is called “Holy Ghost” and sometimes “Holy Spirit.” From this we learn that the prophets did not simply sit down and compose their writings out of their own thoughts. The Spirit of God moved them, compelling them to record the message from the Spirit.

The same was true of the New Testament writers. One of these, the apostle Paul, explains for us how he got the words he used to speak of Christ and the things of God. He said, *“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 2:12,13).

Guided in the Selection of Words

The apostle was actually taught by the Holy Ghost which words to select in order to communicate his message. Paul was a highly educated man, but he had to leave his oratorical education behind when he began to preach Christ, because in this case, he was directed by the Spirit of God what to say. It was not his power, but God’s by which he spoke. He said, *“And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 2:4,5). If Paul’s oratorical ability and his educated selection of words had been the basis of these people’s faith, the power would not have rested in God, but in Paul. As it was, he was God’s mouthpiece, speaking the words of God under the direction of the Spirit of God.

This is the reason why you and I can have utmost confidence in the Bible today. It is not the product of men's ingenuity, but of God's. We do not have to fear that it will lead us astray due to the fallible memories of men, because it is the inspired word of God. God has breathed into the Scriptures his mark of infallibility. The Bible is the only book known to mankind to enjoy this distinction.

Priorities

“Is it wise for a Christian to become too deeply involved in church work? Shouldn’t he have other important interests as well?”

At the outset, I’d like to point out that most Christians I know do have hobbies and interests outside the church. Some of them like to work on cars, collect antiques, water ski, hunt and fish, sew, travel — and a multitude of other things. It’s really not a question of Christians not having other interests. However, to the true Christian, these things are subordinate to his first great love — the Lord and his church.

Jesus taught some parables one time that illustrate the importance of things spiritual to the Christian. He said, *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field”* (Matthew 13:44). Now, let me ask you a question. Do you think that man was wise for selling all his other possessions in order to own the field with the treasure which he knew was buried in it? I don’t think there would be anyone who would not do the same. If you knew you would be rich by purchasing a certain field with treasure in it, wouldn’t you give everything you own to have it? It would be foolish not to, knowing that a gold mine was lying under it.

Great Value of the Kingdom

Notice that Jesus’ real lesson here is about the kingdom of heaven. He said that the kingdom is like that man buying the field with buried treasure. The treasures of eternal life are beyond our wildest dreams. Who would not give everything he

has to be able to live forever in a paradise where there is no pain, death, tears or sorrow?

Jesus continued his parables: *“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it”* (verses 45,46). Would you say that the merchant was wise in buying that fabulous pearl? He knew the pearl was worth a great sum, because he knew pearls. I don't think anyone would accuse him of being a fanatic. Most, if they were in his shoes, would have done the same thing. Many would give their right arm for the same opportunity.

Putting God's Kingdom First

Now, let's make the application. A Christian is a person who has discovered a treasure and a pearl of greater value than all the riches of this world. God has promised him eternal life through his Son Jesus Christ on the condition that he put God and his kingdom first in his life. And so, figuratively speaking, the Christian has “sold all that he hath” and invested in the pearl of eternal life. His life is dedicated to attaining a glorious resurrection at Christ's return. If he seems excited and very zealous over his prospects, that is understandable. Having become heir to a fabulous eternal inheritance, all other considerations of this life have been relegated to secondary importance in his priorities. In addition, life in this world has also become more exciting to him because of his knowledge that he has a treasure that can never be taken from him and which shall endure throughout all eternity.

Preparation for an Afterlife

“Why should I prepare for an afterlife?”

Everyone should be preparing for the afterlife because life on earth is so short. James said, *“For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away”* (James 4:14). Did you ever watch steam rising out of a teakettle and notice how the vapor disappeared after it got just a little way from the spout? That’s how life is. Many old people marvel at how quickly their lives have passed and their youth fled away. They say that it seems like yesterday when they were young and active. When we were little children, a day seemed like a year to us. But when we grew up, the older we became, the more it seemed that a year was like a day. With life so short, the urgency of preparing for the next life is impressed upon us.

The Brevity of this Life

And then, too, when we consider the precariousness of this life, the importance of preparing for the next grows on us. Many young people die. Diseases, accidents, and war claim their share of the young. The Hebrew writer tells us that it is appointed once for men to die, and after this the judgment (Hebrews 9:27). Since the judgment lies just up ahead, and we might lose our lives at any time, how foolish to put all our eggs in one basket and hide our heads in the sand to the truth of the impending judgment for sin ahead!

People are busily preparing themselves for business and employment careers. Many women from their teen years are looking ahead to a husband and a home. People make preparations for these important things. And yet all our financial, mari-

tal, and social dreams can come crashing down around our heads at any moment in this dangerous world in which we live. Sickness, disability and death rob multitudes of fulfilling their hopes in this life. Civil strife and war have wiped out fortunes accumulated over a lifetime of labor and planning. Political and economic upheavals time and again throughout history have destroyed the hopes and dreams of multitudes. And finally, advanced age catches up with every one of us, permanently removing the possibility of any further earthly endeavor.

A Better, Eternal World Ahead

No wonder the apostles of Christ urge us to *“Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Colossians 3:1,2). Just consider what God offers us, and you will see the great urgency of preparing for the afterlife. Jesus promises a life that is free of the perils and dangers we have just described that are characteristic of this world in which we are now living. He said, *“Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you”* (John 6:27). He told his disciples of a house where God has many mansions, or rooms. He said, *“In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also”* (John 14:2,3). In this home of God above, John saw all the unpleasant things of earth absent. He said that in it *“God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away”* (Revelation 21:4).

The Coming Judgment

Finally, another important reason for preparing for the after-life is to escape eternal punishment in hell for our sins. Jesus said that it would be better to get rid of anything that stands in our way of escaping that place. He said, "*And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off; it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched*" (Mark 9:43).

Yes, there are many important reasons for preparing for the afterlife: This life is too short; it can be cut off prematurely; the home ahead is better than this one; and we should do anything it takes to escape punishment for our sins.

John the Baptist

“What was the purpose of John the Baptist’s coming?”

One of the most colorful and fascinating personalities in the Bible is John the Baptist. A great deal is said about him in all four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. He is also mentioned in several places in the book of Acts. The reason for all this is that he was an important figure in the events that surrounded the arrival of Jesus Christ into the world to redeem mankind.

John Prepared the Way for Christ

John’s mission was twofold: (1) He was to be a reformer of the Jews in order to prepare them for the arrival of Jesus Christ. And, (2) he was to be Jesus’ herald when he arrived. Jesus explained his mission as a reformer. He told his disciples, *“Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist”* (Matthew 17:11-13). Here, Christ identified John as the promised Elias, or Elijah, whom the prophets had foretold would come to “restore all things”. When John arrived on the scene, he began preaching that the people should repent, for the kingdom of God was at hand (Matthew 3:2). He said of himself that he was the *“voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight”* (Matthew 3:3). He had come to straighten out the crooked ways of the people. As a result of his fearless preaching, multitudes turned out to hear him in the wilderness. And great

numbers repented and were baptized by him.

John as Herald of the King

John's second great function was to introduce the Son of God when he came. The apostle John said of John the Baptist, "*There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light*" (John 1:6-8).

John's opportunity to bear witness of Christ, the Light of the world, came the day Jesus arrived at the Jordan River to be baptized by John. Let's allow John to explain in his own words that great event: "*The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me.....And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God*" (John 1:29-34).

Matthew also shows the Holy Ghost coming upon Jesus in the visible form of a dove (Matthew 3:16). This was the form which John saw, and bore record of. And so, in this unusual way, John fulfilled his mission as a herald of Jesus Christ. He told the people to repent, and he told them that the great one, the Messiah, was coming. When Christ did come, John was instructed to proclaim his arrival. The way God chose to show him that Jesus was the right man was to send the Holy Ghost in the form of a dove. When John saw this occur, he was to voice that this was the Lamb

of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John remains today a great example of a fearless, faithful preacher of righteousness and repentance. He was killed in the line of duty. Jesus spoke highly of John, because John remained faithful to God and loved not his life to death.

“Other Sheep”

“What did Jesus mean when he said, ‘And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd’ (John 10:16)?”

In order to understand this passage, we need to identify the elements of the parable. For Jesus is definitely speaking in parables here. A parable is a comparison. Christ is comparing himself to a shepherd in the passage. He said, *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep”* (verse 11). Jesus, then, is the shepherd. But who are the sheep?

The sheep are followers of Christ. Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me”* (verse 27). Just as a literal sheep knows the voice of the shepherd and obeys it, so Christ’s true followers know his teaching and follow it. By hearing Christ’s words, we hear his voice. The expression “voice” often is used for “message” in the Scriptures. In Acts 13:27, Paul said that the Jews read the “voices” of the prophets every Sabbath day. Although the prophets had been dead for centuries, still their “voices” or messages continued to be heard in the written word. So, Christ has “sheep” or followers today who have never literally heard his audible voice, but they do hear his “voice” when they learn and obey his word that they read in the Bible.

Jesus said that he had **other sheep not of this fold** which he must bring and that there would be one fold and one shepherd. What is he talking about? What are the other sheep mentioned which come into the one fold under Christ the great Shepherd?

The Fold Is the Church

The answer is simple, for it was plainly taught by the apostles after Christ left that the **fold is the church** and that Jews and Gentiles form one church or fold with Christ as the great Bishop of their souls. Christ said, *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep”* (John 10:11). If we can identify from the word of God what Christ gave his life for, we can identify the fold in this parable. The apostle Paul said that Christ *“purchased the church with his own blood”* and he called it the *“flock of God”* (Acts 20:28). Again, he said that Christ *“loved the church, and gave himself for it”* (Ephesians 5:25). Therefore, the flock of God, the fold that Christ the Chief Shepherd laid down his life for, is the church.

The church is made up of two great segments of humanity — Jew and Gentile. The apostle strives in this letter to the Ephesian Christians to show how that God made both Jew and Gentile one in the church that Jesus died for. He said that Christ came that he *“might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross...”* (Ephesians 2:16). Again, *“For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us”* (verse 14).

The “Other Sheep” Are Gentile Christians

If we keep in mind that for centuries God had only dealt with the Jews as his people from the time of Moses, and then Christ had come to earth and made salvation possible for both Jew and Gentile through his death on the cross, we will have the answer to our question. When Jesus told the Jews in Jerusalem before his death on the cross that *“other sheep I have, which are not of this fold,”* he was simply prophesying to them of the day when

the church would be established which would bring Gentiles into the same flock with the Jews to form one people of God. Then Jesus would rule over both as their Shepherd. He told them that, in that day, "*there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*" (John 10:16).

All distinctions and divisions of mankind are done away in Christ Jesus. In the church, "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus*" (Galatians 3:28). The death of Christ did away with superficial differences between people and made possible the purchase of the church with his blood to make one flock of God in the world.

Gospel Is for All

“Don’t you think that preachers should spend their time trying to reform drunkards, drug users, prostitutes and other derelicts than going among good, moral people who do not need their preaching?”

Many feel that the work of the preacher is to devote his time reforming people of these types. At the outset, I would like to point out that Christ’s gospel is very much for these. Jesus came into the world to save sinners from every walk of life. God’s love is meant for all, no matter how low they have sunk in the mire of sin. But what we must also understand is that everybody needs Christ just as badly as these. Just because a man does not drink, curse, or commit fornication doesn’t mean he is free from other sin. The Bible teaches that *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23)

All Have Sinned

The person who gets drunk on alcohol is a sinner, but so is the non-drinker who doesn’t attend church services to worship God. He is not guilty of drunkenness, but of failing to serve God, which is what he was created to do by the Maker. One of the Ten Commandments given by God to the Israelites sums up the loyalty man owes to God: *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”* (Exodus 20:3). The wise man Solomon said that the **whole duty** of man is to *“fear God and keep his commandments”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13). A person who does not actively serve God is just as much a sinner in this way as the drunkard is in his.

There are many men and women who are desperately enslaved to the bottle. On the other hand, there are just as many

who are slaves to the dollar. Their lives are intent upon one thing — making more money. They have become so entangled and enslaved to this desire that they have no time for their families or service to God. In all other respects, they may be morally upright, but in this they are sinning against God and their loved ones. Paul plainly tells us that a covetous man is an idolater and has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Ephesians 5:5). An idolater is a person who worships idols. In this case, the money-lover actually is serving his money to the point that it has replaced God in his life, and so he has become an idolater.

We All Need Christ

Let's make no mistake about it, Christ did not only taste death for the inhabitants of skid row, but for you and me too! The Hebrew writer says that he "*tasted death for every man*" (Hebrews 2:9). No man or woman who has ever lived has lived a life entirely free of the blot of sin. And so it was necessary that Christ die in order to remove their guilt of sin from the sight of God. No man can boast and point the finger at others as though he does not need the blood of Christ himself. The apostle Paul points out that all "*we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us...*" (Titus 3:3-5).

If it were not for the mercy of God, not one of us could stand in his presence. His purity and holiness make our hearts look as black as the inside of a coal mine. To be sure, somebody needs to preach to the people on skid row. But let's not have the false impression that they are the only ones who need Christ. Without

forgiveness through him, no man can stand justified in the presence of God.