

INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of people on this planet are poor and uneducated. It has always been so, and perhaps always will be. Yet, it was these "common people" who followed Jesus and heard Him gladly (Lk. 12:37.) As shocking as it might seem, these are also the people that Jesus chose to be His apostles. In spite of their limited learning, Jesus was able to lead them in the way that He wanted them to go. It boggles our mind that an Omniscient God would choose such unlettered peasants as His ambassadors to the world. His chosen apostles were void of earthly credentials. As peasants from Galilee, they had little or no opportunity for formal education. Consequently, they were victims of discrimination and ridicule. Their thick Galilean accent was easily recognizable (Matt. 26:73.) Others considered them to be unlearned and ignorant (Acts 4:13.) Perhaps they were. Choosing such men, however, was not an accident. Jesus prayed all night before selecting His apostles (Lk. 6:12.) It is obvious that God does things differently than men. Paul recognized this reality and wrote:

"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence" (I Cor. 1:26-29.)

God does not think the way we think, or do things the way we would do them (Is. 55:8.) His ways are higher than our ways, and His thoughts than our thoughts. His ways, however, do work! During the lifetime of the apostles they preached the Gospel to the whole creation (Col. 1:23.) His disciples penetrated every stratum of Roman society and ultimately toppled the tyrannical Caesars. This was accomplished by men without money, power, or prestige. Their remarkable victory was a vindication of God. It was a glorious tribute to His power. They did not do it by their own strength! God was their sufficiency (II Cor. 3:5!) God directed their lives! God orchestrated their efforts! The early Christians recognized this and sang the song of Moses: **"Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. 15:3.)**

At this point it is important to draw a distinction between Christianity and other movements which work among the poor. Christianity does not exalt ignorance. The disciples of Jesus have always been free to follow truth. Today, Christians are among the best educated people on earth. Many, if not most, of the great universities of the world were founded by Christians. Nevertheless, Christianity, past and present, still has its roots among poor and oppressed people.

This is a book about the guidance of God! In this book we will endeavor to show that God can give guidance to you! This guidance is not necessarily given in proportion to your IQ or education. It is something which is available to all believers on the basis of their dedication and faith. When we look at history we can see the hand of God at work in nations. Hopefully, we will also be able to see God at work in our own lives.

EASTERN EUROPE

Consider the recent revolution in Eastern Europe. Surely the hand of God was in it. For more than seventy years they were crushed by the tyranny of athiestic Communism. These poor peasants were harrassed, persecuted, and slaughtered by the millions. Those who survived were kept in ignorance and treated as slaves. Today, they are free. Today, their totalitarian masters are gone. These dictators were not defeated by an invasion from without, nor by organized resistance from within. Opposition came gradually and relentlessly, like leaven transforms a loaf of bread. Like tiny seeds, truth pressed its way through cracks in the concrete of athiestic ignorance. Out of the depths of persecution and despair, these desperate people reached for the light. The more sunlight they found, the stronger they became. The radient light of truth sanitized their thoughts. Ultimately, they achieved victory. As in days of the early church, their efforts were orchestrated by God. The communists made the same mistake the Caesars did. They thought they could drown the church in the blood of martyrs. Quite to the contrary, such persecution only serves to purify the church.

ROMANIA

Let us now narrow our focus and consider the liberation of Romania. The Iron Curtain had already unraveled in Poland and Czechoslovakia. The experts predicted that it would not happen in Romania for many years. The experts, however, were wrong. God was at work among the people. Multiplied thousands gathered in the streets of Bucharest. They held candles in the air and sang. They knelt to pray in front of tanks and machine guns. They faced bristling bayonets with a smile. Some even placed flowers in the gun barrels of their oppressors. When the soldiers opened fire, the crowd did not disperse. As if directed by an unseen hand the masses remained as one. They did not run for cover, or abandon their martyrs who died in the streets. What happened next borders upon the miraculous. In only a few brief hours, Nicolae Ceausescu was dead, and his murderous regime had vanished like a vapor. Like their brethren in the First Century: **"They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11.)**

CHINA

This remarkable phenomenon swept Europe and the former U.S.S.R. Literally tens of thousands confessed Jesus Christ as Lord. At the same time, revival was also breaking out in China. God was at work! The magnitude of these movements was beyond the scope of mortal man. Some believe the revival in China is the greatest of all time. This too, is happening in spite of tremendous persecution. Not long ago, Mao Tse-tung murdered between 30 and 60 million of his own people. He has the dubious distinction of creating the greatest holocaust in history. He did not, and could not kill the church. Jesus promised that the gates of Hell could not prevail against it. Consequently, the Church in China is alive and well. Some have estimated that there are fifty to one hundred million believers in China today. Without the benefit of freedom, money, power, or prestige, the Chinese Church is perhaps the most evangelistic church on earth.

No man, or group of men, can explain how this great revival has taken place. **"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8.)** In the midst of a maelstrom of religious activity a still small voice reminds us: **"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation . . ." (Lk. 17:20.)** Real revival is not worked up, it is prayed down. It cannot be drafted, dictated, or documented by the finite mind. It cannot be voted in, voted out, or voted on. There is a dramatic difference between an organization produced by man, and an organism created by God.

TODAY'S WORLD

There are over six billion people on this planet. Most are like the original apostles. They are common people. They too are without money, power, or prestige. They have no formal education. They have no influence beyond their small circle of family and friends. They are often subjected to ridicule and scorn. They have no access to ancient manuscripts. They are not scholars or religious leaders. Most cannot read. Many do not even have a written language. These are the ones whom Jesus promised to lead like sheep. These are the members of His Body whom He directs and controls to accomplish His work.

MY JOURNEY

Today, these statements seem obvious and unavoidable. This truth, however, has not always been obvious to me. I once assumed that discipleship was tedious and technical. I assumed that guidance from God was reserved for the religious elite. I assumed that it could only come through the type of diligent research and careful study available to a graduate student in theology.

It was about 1978 when I first discovered that "making disciples," was the only imperative in the Great Commission. The commands to go (poreuthentes,) baptize (baptizontes,) and teach (didaskontes,) are all participles. The command to make disciples (mathateusate,) is the only imperative. I became convinced that Jesus emphasized this for a reason. For more than ten years I searched the Scriptures seeking to discover how I was to make disciples. All the while, I was struggling with feelings of guilt and inadequacy. I didn't think I was obeying Jesus, and I didn't know how to. I assumed that making disciples required that I gather about me a small group, as Jesus did. I hadn't! The very thought of doing so made me uncomfortable. Consequently, I expanded my study to include a wide variety of books on the subject. Nothing I read seemed feasible for me.

I started a special discipleship class. We met each Lord's Day morning at 8:00. I confessed to them my own ignorance and feeling of inadequacy. I felt that the Bible had answers for us, and I was determined to study until I found them.

My initial approach, however, failed. I piled up page after page of copious notes, but my confusion was only intensified. After months of study, I had more questions than answers.

A physics professor once observed that a proper course in problem solving makes each new step progressively more obvious and simple. My study had only made me more confused. Obviously, I was going in the wrong direction.

A TURNING POINT

A turning point in my own study came when I dared to question the assumption that discipleship was equated with small groups. It is true that Jesus gathered about Him a small group of disciples, but it does not necessarily follow that everyone has to. Jesus only did what God directed Him to do. Thus it dawned on me that the foundation of discipleship is not small groups, it is obedience. Jesus did not come to earth to do His own will, but the will of the Father which sent Him (John 6:38.) This is precisely what everyone is to do.

The Scriptures teach that when a disciple is perfected, he will be as his master (Lk. 6:40.) Our goal is to be like Jesus. This is the very essence of discipleship. Being like Jesus must involve obedience, but does not necessarily involve small groups. True discipleship involves doing the will of God, regardless of what that entails. This is so simple, and so obvious. Why hadn't I seen it years before?

INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENTS

God does not necessarily direct every disciple to do identically the same thing. The Gospels have many examples of individual assignments. On a variety of occasions, Jesus allowed only Peter, James, and John to be with Him. This included the Mount of Transfiguration, the raising of Jairus' daughter, and Gethsemane. When Jesus cast a legion of demons out of a man in Gadara, that man wanted to follow Him. Jesus refused his request and commanded him to go home and tell his friends what great things God had done for him (Mk. 5:19.) Only two disciples were sent to fetch a donkey (Lk. 19:29-30.) Only two disciples were sent to prepare the Passover (Mk. 14:13.) etc.

Individual assignments are also evident in the book of Acts. Peter, for example, was called of God to preach to Cornelius (Acts 10:) Paul had a special call to Macedonia (Acts 16:) God called men like Peter and Philip to work alone. God called men like Paul, Barnabas, Silas, etc. to work in teams. We have every reason to believe that Peter obeyed Christ, but if he gathered about him a small group of disciples, the Scriptures say nothing about it.

Again, we must emphasize that Jesus taught His disciples to do the will of God, regardless of what that involved. This is also the foundation of true discipleship in our own lives. How utterly simple!

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPLY

If we are going to be disciples of Jesus, and follow Him, we must have contact with Him. This is both obvious and inescapable. Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. If He cannot communicate with, and supply His troops, there can be no victory.

Consider what happened in the Gulf War. Sadaam Hussein expected it to be the "Mother of all Battles." It wasn't! He had a huge army, but they were rendered ineffective by the destruction of their lines of communication and supply. In the Kuwaiti Theater of Operation, allied strategists estimated that the arrogant dictator had:

530,000 men
4,300 tanks
2,700 armored fighting vehicles
3,000 artillery pieces

Obviously, this was a formidable fighting force. Hussein naively assumed there would be a prolonged conflict like Viet Nam. He was wrong!

The allied ground offensive began on Feb. 24th at 4 a.m. In only one hundred hours the war was over.

One major reason for Hussein's remarkable defeat is that allied forces destroyed his communication lines. From the very beginning, his command center was a prime target.

Hussein's principal source of secured contact with his troops was fiber optic cable. This cable crossed the Euphrates several times by means of bridges. Airplanes destroyed all of these bridges but two. On the eve of the ground war, the last two bridges were demolished by special forces. General Norman Schwarzkopf said: "We put his eyes out." Hussein's well coordinated war machine was thrown into disarray and confusion. Captured Iraqi Generals had no idea what was going on. They were amazed to discover that over 60,000 of their soldiers had surrendered.

Allied troops, by contrast, were in constant contact with their command center. They knew what to do, and when to do it. They were not only able to receive guidance, but also supplies.

Communication and supply are important factors in gaining the victory.

APPLICATION

Now let's apply this truth to discipleship. Following Jesus involves contact and communication. During the three years of our Lord's public ministry, the disciples primarily received guidance directly from Jesus. They followed Him and were constantly in His presence. When He was with Peter, James, and John on the mountain, however, He could not be with the other disciples in the valley. This left some of His disciples without guidance. This is why Jesus said it was expedient for Him to go away (John 16:7.) When He went away, the Comforter could come. When He was released from the confines of His human body, He could be everywhere at once. The Holy Spirit could guide all of His disciples simultaneously.

It is the design of this book to show that this beautiful relationship of Jesus with His disciples continues to this very day. Victorious Christian living involves constant contact with Christ. When the devil destroys our communication with Christ, we will be defeated. The Scriptures teach that to be severed from Christ is to be fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4.)

An unknown poet has captured the beauty of this relationship:

He does not guide me year by year, nor even day by day,
But step by step my path unfolds, My Lord directs my way.
Tomorrow's plans I do not know, I only know this minute,
But He will say, "This is the way, by faith now walk ye in it."
And I am glad that it is so; today is enough to bear,
And when tomorrow comes, His grace shall far exceed its care.
What need to worry then, or fret, the God who gave His Son,
Holds all my moments in His hand and gives them one by one.

Communication and supply are essential ingredients in Christian warfare. It is exciting to realize that Jesus will never leave us, or forsake us. Once recognized, this same truth is seen in other Biblical analogies. Consider the relationship of Father and son, Husband and wife, Shepherd and sheep, Head and body, etc.

Every one of these relationships requires communication. If the Head of the Body, cannot control the members of the Body, the Body is ineffective. The Body of Christ, however, is not ineffective. It is not paralyzed or dead. It is alive with vibrant power that is able to accomplish exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

The Deist believes that God created the universe and then left it alone. Christians know differently. Christians believe that God is interested in, and vitally involved in every aspect of our lives. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father, and we are of more value than many sparrows (Matt. 10:29-31.) This thrilling truth can literally transform your life.

The guidance of God has always been available, but many times His people have not been aware of it. May the reading of this book help this glorious truth dawn upon you in all its simplicity and fulness.

- You can be filled with all the fulness of God!
- His power within you can accomplish exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or imagine.
- The redeemed of the earth are those who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth" (Rev. 14:4.)
- You can be redeemed! You can follow Jesus wherever He leads!

CHAPTER I

TOTAL SURRENDER TO GOD!

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with your whole heart (Jer. 29:13.)

Pagan gods were easy to find. They were always visible and in the same place. They were so impotent, however, they could not even protect themselves from the pigeons that roosted on their heads. Jehovah, by contrast, was known as the "Living God." Isaiah described Him as "a God that hideth Thyself" (Is. 45:15.) The Only True God is a Spirit. He hides Himself from unbelievers, but reveals Himself to those who seek Him with their whole heart.

Consider the story of the late Dr. George Washington Carver. He was one of the most brilliant scientists of all time. He was born a slave. He was without many of the advantages which most take for granted. He didn't even know the date of his birth. He only knew that he was born before slavery was abolished in Missouri., which happened in January 1865.

Early in life, Dr. Carver gave himself to God. It seems obvious that he sought the Lord with his whole heart. He never married, and spent the prime and vigor of his life in service to others. He found that God was reliable, dependable, and a very present help in time of trouble.

George spent the first years of his life with Mr. and Mrs. Moses Carver. Some of his spiritual guidance obviously came from them, and he became a Christian at the age of eight. At about nine he moved to Neosho, Missouri to attend school, and lived with Andrew and Mariah Watkins. They also helped him spiritually. When he left their humble home in 1876, Mariah gave him her Bible. It was a beautiful, leather bound Bible, and was obviously very expensive. Carver read that Bible every day of his life. He read it on the day of his death, January 5, 1943. It was a lamp unto his feet, and a light unto his path. This very Bible is now on display at the Carver National Monument, just west of Diamond, Missouri. Mariah's name can still be seen embossed in gold upon the cover.

This beautiful epitaph is written on Carver's grave: "He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world."

Thomas Edison tried to hire him at a minimum salary of \$100,000 per year. He declined. To the day of his death he was paid only \$125 per month, and refused every raise. "What would I do with more money?" he would say, "I already have all the earth."

This is a book about discipleship. We are endeavoring to show that the disciples of Christ receive guidance from him. Dr. Carver is a wonderful example in this regard. He once said that he loved to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting system through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune Him in. He frequently took his Bible with him to the laboratory.

On one occasion, he was reported to have prayed to God that he might understand the universe. The

Lord responded that it would be too difficult. Then he prayed to understand man. Once again, the Lord said that this also would be too hard for him. Finally, Dr. Carver said: "Well, then teach me about the peanut." The Lord consented to do this. For two days and nights Dr. Carver was constantly in his laboratory. He dismissed the worried students who tapped upon his door. He felt he was a mortal instrument involved in a divine revelation. When he went into his laboratory, man only knew about three kingdoms: animal, vegetable, and mineral. When he emerged, he had discovered a fourth kingdom, the kingdom of synthetics. God showed him how to take apart the peanut, and put the individual components together in different ways. From the ingredients which God had placed in the peanut, Dr. Carver was able to synthesize three hundred different products.

He once held a congressional committee spellbound for two hours while demonstrating this dazzling array of synthetics. Dr. Carver showed them various beverages, cosmetics, foods, and medicines. It sounds impossible, but cherry punch and nitroglycerine can both be synthesized from the peanut. His amazing list would ultimately include such incongruities as buttermilk and axle grease, chili sauce and linoleum, shampoo and plastic, instant coffee and laundry soap. Representative Barkley asked: "Where did you learn all this?" Carver answered, "from a book." What book? Dr. Carver answered, "The Bible!"

One reason Dr. Carver knew the Lord so well, is that he was seeking Him with his whole heart. God is a jealous God. He does not reveal Himself to those who are lukewarm and indifferent. David said it like this: **"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord . . . : (Ps. 37:23.)** James concurred: **"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (Ja. 5:16.)**

As we begin our study of God's amazing guidance, it is important that we approach Him with obedient hearts. God is not like the proverbial genie who pops out of a bottle and obeys our every command. He is the Sovereign of the universe to whom we must surrender everything.

Do you need guidance from God?

Do you need divine direction in your life?

Are there problems in your family which you cannot solve?

The Bible has good news for you! God knows the answer to your every problem. Furthermore, as a loving Father, He wants to give you answers. He wants help you. He wants to give you guidance. He wants to assist you in every circumstance of life. No problem is too big. No problem is too small. You will not find God, however, unless you seek Him with your whole heart.

James, the brother of our Lord, focuses on the importance of unwavering faith. He wrote:

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 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. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:5-8.)

The answer to your biggest problems, may only be a prayer away. Remember, however, you will not get God's wisdom if you are "double minded." You can only find God when you seek Him with your whole heart!

THE MOST IMPORTANT COMMANDMENT IN THE BIBLE

Jesus was once asked: **"Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"** All truths are equally true, but not all truths are equally important. Therefore, Jesus responded:

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:36-37)

These words of Jesus are in complete harmony with the message of Jeremiah. Both state the necessity of seeking God with our whole heart. This is, as Jesus said, the most important commandment in the law.

The Bible word for "heart" involves man in his totality.

- It includes our mind: **"for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he (Prov. 23:7.)**
- It includes our emotions: **"Let not your heart be troubled" (John 14:1.)**
- It includes our will: **"Every man as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give (II Cor.**

9:7.)

The first, and most important commandment in the Bible, instructs us to love God with all of our mind, emotion, and will.

To love God with all of our "heart, soul, and mind," is obviously repetition for the sake of emphasis. God will not accept worship from those who are "lukewarm" (Rev. 3:16.) If you truly want to be guided by God, you must search for Him with your whole heart. You must love Him with all of your heart, soul, and mind.

True commitment to God is illustrated in Scripture by marriage. The wedding vows are for "better or worse, richer or poorer, sickness or health, until death do us part." God comes to the marriage altar with no reservations. He loved us with every drop of blood in His veins. How can we claim to be His bride with only a partial commitment? How can we claim to love him on Sunday, and love someone else, or something else during the rest of the week. As ridiculous as it sounds, this is precisely the way that many people come to Jesus. They want all of the benefits and blessings of being His bride, without submission, surrender, and commitment.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote "The Cost of Discipleship." In this book he charged that:

"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."

Bonhoeffer practiced what he preached. In 1939, concerned friends tried to get him to leave Germany for reasons of personal safety. He declined to do so. When arrested by the Gestapo, he openly confessed Christ and denounced their totalitarian government.

From prison he wrote:

"I am sure of God's hand and guidance . . . you must never doubt that I am thankful and glad to go the way which I am being led. My past life is abundantly full of God's mercy, and above all sin stands the forgiving love of the crucified."

In 1944 his friends wanted to liberate him from prison. He declined their offer, fearing it would endanger someone's life. He spent his last days ministering to the victims of Hitler's hate. The day before his death he conducted a Christian service for all the prisoners, both Catholic and Protestant.

On April 9, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed by special order of Himmler. He was only thirty-nine. A fellow prisoner testified that he died with the same calmness and spiritual dignity that he had lived. Just a few days later, his concentration camp at Flossenburg was liberated by the Allies.

GOD IS A JEALOUS GOD

The first commandment that Moses received from God on Mount Sinai was:

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me!"

The next commandment expanded and explained:

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God . . ." (Ex. 20:3-5.)

God is a jealous God! This fact is illustrated many times in Scripture. Take, for example, the rebuke of the prophet Ezekiel. He accused Israel of committing spiritual adultery. He said they were **"as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband . . ."** (Ez. 16:32.) He wrote: **"I will judge thee, as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will give thee blood in fury and jealousy"** (Ez. 16:38.) God will not tolerate unfaithfulness. God is a jealous God!

The Bible is filled with warnings for the unfaithful. Consider:

Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:)
Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Nu. 16:)
Achan (Joshua 7:)
Ahab and Jezebel (I Ki. 21: - 22:)
Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:)

Herod (Acts 12:)
etc.

Isaiah said it beautifully:

"I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Is. 42:8.)

When we come to God for help, we need to do so in complete and total submission to His sovereign will. We will find the Lord, when we seek Him with our whole heart.

JESUS IS GOD

The people of the world have sought for God in every generation (Acts 17:27) One reason we do so, is that God has placed a god shaped vacuum in every human heart (Eccl. 3:11.) Though God is not far from any one of us, most people have no idea what He is like. The pagans, for example, pictured God by means of crude images and idols. In their ignorance, they did not know God. Even the Jewish people did not have a clear concept of God. This is why they crucified Jesus. The Law had only a "shadow" of good things to come, and not substance (Heb. 10:1.) God is substance and not a shadow (Ja. 1:17.) No one can have an accurate view of God, or anyone else, from a shadow. Shadows are ever changing, but God is never changing.

Therefore, God determined to manifest Himself to mankind in the person of Jesus Christ. Understanding this is essential to discipleship. We cannot accurately understand or follow a God whom we cannot see. Jesus made God visible. He came to leave us an example that we should follow in His steps (I Pet. 2:1.) John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, explained the miracle of the incarnation in these words:

"No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John 1:18.)

The Greek word translated as "declared," is "exegeomai." It means to "lead out," or "make known." It is the basis of our English word "exegete." An exegetical sermon is one that merely explains the text. Jesus is the "eegesis," or "explanation" of God. He is God manifest in the flesh. John also calls Jesus the "Word" of God (John 1:1.) A word is a vehicle of communication. Jesus, therefore, became the vehicle by which God communicates His nature to His people. Jesus revealed and explained God. In Jesus dwells all the fulness of the Godhead in a body, and you are complete in Him (Col. 2:9-10,) The very essence of Christianity involves the realization that God became flesh and dwelt among us. His name is "Emmanuel," which means, "God with us."

This point is so important that it needs to be demonstrated in greater detail. No man can follow God, without following Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and no man can come unto the Father except by Him (John 14:6.) There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man, Christ Jesus (I Tim. 2:5.) Note that everything which the Bible represents as pertaining to the nature of God, is also attributed to Jesus. Consider:

Both are the great "I Am" (Ex. 3:14, John 8:58)
Both are the "First and the Last" (Is. 44:6, Rev. 1:11)
Both are "Lord of Lords" (Deut. 10:17, Rev. 17:14)
Both fill the heavens and the earth (Jer. 23:24, Eph. 1:20-23)
Both do not change (Mal. 3:6, Heb. 13:8)
Both are Creators (Gen. 1:1, Col. 1:16)
Both are Judges (Rev. 20:12, II Cor. 5:10)
Both are to be worshiped (Matt. 4:10, Rev. 5:12-14)
etc.
Truly, Jesus is "God manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16)

God is faithful and merciful. He proved this to us in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He is the very personification of love. It is the ultimate joy to surrender to this kind of a God. We have a God who loves little children. We have a God who has compassion on the sick. We have a God who is willing to save to the uttermost all who come unto Him by faith. Nevertheless, we must remind you again, there is no way to avoid or evade total surrender. Jesus said:

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33.)

Our commitment to Christ is to be so all encompassing and complete, that it is like taking up a cross. It is like "dying to self" so that Christ might live in us (Gal. 2:20.)

ARE YOU WILLING TO MAKE A COMMITMENT?

The word "gospel," means "good news." If you are willing to make a commitment to Christ, you can be immediately saved. Salvation is not earned, it is a gift from God. Once saved, you can grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are not willing to make a total commitment to Christ, however, the eternal blessings of His Kingdom will be hidden from your eyes. God loves you! At this very moment He is searching for you like a shepherd looks for a lost sheep. Thank you for picking up this book, and for reading this far. Regardless of the state of your spiritual development and maturity, God wants to help you. He wants to give you guidance. Remember, He will reveal Himself to you in a special way when you seek Him with your whole heart.

Jesus said:

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one . . ." (John 10:27-30.)

God is a God of love. He is, however, not like an over indulgent grandfather who bestows gifts, regardless of how we live. He is a Jealous God who demands our total surrender and commitment. He commands that we love Him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. Life's ultimate joy is to seek Him

with your whole heart.

A SIMPLISTIC OVERVIEW

Before creation, God was everything.

With creation came rebellion.

When this world is over, every vestige of rebellion will be destroyed. Every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Jesus will then deliver a subjected universe to the Father, and once again God will be everything to everybody (see Phil. 2:9-11, I Cor. 15:25-28.)

IF YOU WANT TO RECEIVE WISDOM AND GUIDANCE FROM GOD, YOU FIRST MUST SEEK HIM WITH YOUR WHOLE HEART!

CHAPTER II

YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN

In Old Testament times, people were forced to be good by fear. Consider this severe attempt at coercion in the days of Asa:

"And they entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul; that whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman . . . (II Chron. 15:12-13.)"

The Law, as you know, was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. The Law was not designed to make men good, it was designed to make men guilty.

"Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God (Rom. 3:19.)"

The Law was not an end in itself, it was a means to an end. It was designed by God to prepare us for a revolutionary concept which had been kept secret since the foundation of the world. Jesus spoke about this to Nicodemus.

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

Nicodemus was a religious man, and a ruler of the Jews. Nevertheless, he had no comprehension of the kingdom of God. Jesus told him that he had to be born again in order to see it.

The kingdom of God was in his presence, but he could not see it! The solution for Nicodemus was not more education, or better manuscripts. He needed to be born again. He needed a new kind of life.

"To know," in the Biblical sense, means to become intimate with so that a new life is produced. The Scriptures teach: **"And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived and bare Cain . . . " (Gen. 4:1.)** A physical seed, planted in a physical womb, produced physical life.

To "know" Jesus also produces new life. When a spiritual seed is placed in a spiritual womb, a spiritual life is produced. This is what it means to be "born again," or "born from above." When we seek after God with our whole heart, we are candidates for a wonderful new life.

Everyone is familiar with the fact that seeds grow when they are planted in the proper environment. We plant bare grain, but God gives it a body as it pleases Him. The miracle of physical life, produced by a corruptible seed, pales into insignificance when compared with eternal life produced by an incorruptible seed. Consider these Scriptures:

"Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures . . . wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word which is able to save your souls (Ja. 1:18-21.)

"Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God which liveth and abideth for ever" (I Pet. 2:23.)

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (creation): old things are passed away: behold all things are become new" (II Cor. 5:17.)

THERE ARE TWO CREATIONS

The Bible describes two different creations. One is "physical," and the other is "spiritual." One can be seen with human eyes, but the other can only be seen by faith.

The Greek verb "poieo" is found 565 times in the N.T. Scriptures. It means to "make, or do." The noun form of this word, "poiema," is found only twice in the Bible. It is the basis of our English word "poem."

The first use of "poiema" is in Rom. 1:20, where it is translated as "made" in the King James Version.

"For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are MADE . . ."

The physical creation is like a gigantic poem. It communicates something to man of God's eternal power and nature. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. The clockwork of the heavens, and the rhyme and meter of earth, are like a beautiful poem from God. Nicodemus could see the physical creation of God.

The only other use of "poiema" in the Scriptures is in Eph. 2:10, where it is translated as "workmanship."

"For we are His WORKMANSHIP, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we would walk in them."

The spiritual creation of God is also like a poem. Nicodemus could not see this creation until he was born again.

The physical creation is wonderful. Our vast universe is not only filled with billions of blazing suns, there are also millions of miniature miracles on display. The God who created the galaxies, is also the God who made the atom. He makes snowflakes and flowers, as well as planets and stars.

The spiritual creation is just as real as the physical, and perhaps even more complex and elaborate. This is the kingdom which Nicodemus could not see until he was born again. In association with spiritual reality Paul wrote:

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Sprit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (I Cor. 2:14.)

You must be born again in order to see the Kingdom of God.

It is easy to illustrate the reality of that which is unseen. At this very moment, we are all surrounded by literally thousands of unseen impulses. These impulses are filled with unlimited images and information. A simple transistor radio will enable us to tune in some of them. A portable TV will reveal the presence of others. A short wave radio can bring information from afar. A cellular phone can provide contact with others. The proper satellite equipment makes available even more sources of information. All of these unseen impulses are not only surrounding us, they are moving through us. They are filled with unlimited sources of information, but we must have the proper equipment in order to receive them.

When you are born again, you are a new creation. Old things pass away and everything becomes new. As a new creature, you have spiritual ability and insight that you never had before.

CONFORMATION, OR TRANSFORMATION

The Scriptures teach that we are not to be **"conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2.)** The Bible word "transformed" comes from the Greek word "metamorphoo." This is basically the same as our English word "metamorphosis." The conversion experience is like a metamorphosis. It is like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. The miracle of metamorphosis enables the same creature to become different. The caterpillar cannot float on the evening breeze and sip nectar from flowers. No matter how hard the caterpillar tries, it can never migrate from Canada to Mexico. Once the caterpillar is transformed, however, it is natural to fly. Once the caterpillar has gone through the metamorphosis, it instinctively and intuitively knows how to migrate thousands of miles. Those caterpillars which do not change, will be frozen to death. Those who do, can enjoy the balmy breezes of the South.

Ezekiel saw the miracle of conversion centuries before it became a reality. He wrote:

"A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ez. 36:26-27.)

Paul wrote about this "metamorphosis" in II Cor. 3:. In this beautiful passage he explained that he did not need letters of commendation. The transformed lives of his converts validated his message. Christians really are different.

Paul wrote:

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed (metamorphosis) into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18.)

TWO COVENANTS

The Old Covenant was Ten Commandments. It was written by the finger of God when he took His people by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. This covenant had to be taught to, and forced upon the children of Israel.

Because people are invariably at different stages of growth and development, the Old Covenant was always a source of debate and controversy. For example, the Jewish scholars never did agree on what it meant to "remember the sabbath and keep it holy." They were debating this when Jesus was alive, and they are still debating it today. For this reason the Old Covenant was represented by the allegory of Hagar and Ishmael (see Gal. 4:19-31.) Ishmael was a **"wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him . . ."** (Gen. 16:12.) This was the nature of the Old Covenant, and men were forced to conform to external law by threat of punishment. It did not work. It had an appearance of wisdom, but was of no value in suppressing the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:23.)

The new covenant is not written in stone. It is written in the minds and hearts of converted people. It is not a carnal covenant, it is spiritual. The New Covenant becomes a reality when God removes our heart of stone, and replaces it with a heart of flesh. God promised to put His own Spirit within us, and to cause us to walk in His ways. The pressure to live the Christian life does not come from without, but from within. We are not conformed, but transformed.

Consider again these inspired words:

"For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying Know the Lord: for all shall know me , from the least to the greatest. Fro I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more . . . " (Heb. 8:7-12.)

FATHER AND SON

When we are born again, we become the children of God. We are the product of His seed. Paul wrote:

"For we are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:26-27.)

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God (Rom. 8:14.)

As we grow in grace and knowledge we become more like God. John wrote:

"Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother (I John 3:9-10.)

Those who are "born again," have received the "seed," or "sperm," of God. As His seed grows within us, we become more, and more like Him. One of the many blessings of our new life in Christ, is that somehow, we will follow Jesus, but will not follow a stranger (John 10:5.)

HOW CAN WE BE BORN AGAIN?

The subject of conversion is hotly debated in the religious world. How sad! Many people attempt to avoid total surrender by church shopping. One woman selected a particular denomination, because, she said: "They had the best deal on salvation of any church in town." This is, of course, an insult to God. You only find God when you search for Him with your whole heart. Salvation involves drawing near to God, not trying to avoid Him. Ananias and Sapphira tried to trifle with God and died in the process (Acts 5:1-11.) As we have said before, we can only be born again when we are willing to make a total surrender and commitment to God.

Even physical life is a miracle beyond the understanding of mortal man. Solomon wrote:

"As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all" (Eccl. 11:5.)

The mystery of physical life should not be taken lightly. The Psalmist marveled at the majesty of his own conception and wrote:

"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written . . ." (Ps. 139:13-16.)

Even with all the advances of medical science a great many men are impotent, and thousands of women are barren. The gift of physical life is only God's to give. No man, or group of men, has ever created a single living thing. The miracle of life can only come from God.

Spiritual life is even more wonderful than physical life. Certainly it transcends the slogans and shibboleths of denominations created by men. It is life's most desirable and important experience. Please do not approach being born again in a nonchalant and indifferent way.

Beware of anyone who reduces salvation to only one thing. Obviously, the new birth involves the Father, but not the Father "only." The Son and Holy Spirit also have a part to play in salvation. Christianity involves angels. They are described as: "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who are the heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14.) Angels rejoice every time a sinner repents (Lk. 15:10.) Angels ministered to Jesus, and yet He was tempted in all points like as we are (Heb. 4:15.) Angels only, however, cannot save anybody. The Word of God is able to save us (Ja. 1:21,) but not the Word of God "only." Man also has a part to play. The Word of God has to be received. Christ is our Savior, but He does not save anyone against their own will. Christ also has to be received. The total resources of heaven and earth are marshalled to make it possible for every person to share the miracle of salvation.

"For all things are your's; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's" (I Cor. 3:21-23.)

Faith is essential to our salvation, but we are not saved by faith "only" (James 2:24.) Confession obviously has some part to play. **"For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. 10:10.)** "Only," confessing, however, is not enough. Every Christian knows that repentance is not an option. We repent, or we perish, but we cannot be saved by repentance "only." We are to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38.) Peter wrote that we are saved by baptism (I Pet. 3:21,) but not by baptism "only." Holiness is also essential to salvation. We are to follow after peace and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14.) etc.

At the same time we are guarding against the error of adding "only," to the word of God, we must also guard against another error. There are ditches on both sides of the road. Salvation must not be pictured as so difficult that no one can attain it. Exactly the reverse is true. Salvation is available for anyone who will seek the Lord with his whole heart. Remember the story of the prodigal son. As he was coming home, the Father ran to meet him. The Father commanded that he be adorned and prepared for a position of honor. When we come to Christ, He gives us power. This power operating within us enables us to do **"exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20.)**

THE CONVERSION OF THE MEANEST MAN IN TEXAS

Don Umphreys wrote the book: THE MEANEST MAN IN TEXAS. It is about the late Clyde Thompson. Clyde was a preacher's kid gone bad. He murdered his first two victims in 1928. He laughed hysterically when he was convicted and sentenced to death. His execution number was 83. Each time a prisoner was put to death, every other prisoner was moved one cell closer to the death chamber. They called the electric chair, "Old Sparky." After an execution the hallway would be filled with the horrible stench of burning flesh and hair. Clyde's date with death was commuted by Gov. Sterling just seven hours before his execution.

His meanness became legendary. The Ft. Worth Star Telegram accumulated a file with fifty stories

about him. His first attempted escape came in 1932. He was caught and placed in a grueling work detail. The torture only made him meaner.

His reputation for toughness was a source of constant trouble. Guards felt that they had to try and intimidate him. They didn't! Once a guard didn't like his attitude and threatened to shoot him. Clyde responded by cursing the guard and throwing a hoe at him. Then he ripped open his shirt, popping the buttons, and dared the guard to shoot him in the heart. He didn't!

Clyde was stripped and placed in the hole. His hands were manacled behind his back and his feet were chained. To make the torture more severe, his feet were drawn backward and padlocked to the hand cuffs. Then he was left in the darkness with no way to protect himself from hungry bugs and mosquitoes. The experience only made him meaner.

In 1933 he tried to escape again. One convict was killed in the attempt. Clyde's hat was shot off, but he was unscratched. Afterward, however, he was severely beaten by a guard and suffered numerous injuries including several broken ribs. The man who ratted on him was Tommy Ries. Clyde gave him a death sentence far more quick and certain than the State of Texas would impose. In short order, he murdered Tommy with a home made knife smuggled out of the prison blacksmith shop.

Clyde's reputation for meanness was enhanced because he once took a "caning" without uttering a sound. He was stripped naked and held down by four guards. The fifth guard beat him with a leather "bat" about thirty inches long. After quietly taking twenty-one strokes, Clyde got up and asked someone to give him a light for his cigarette.

On May 29, 1935 a prisoner named Everett Melvin tried to force him to perform a homosexual act. Clyde killed him. When the guards came, he said to the Captain: "Well, Cap, it looks like I'm in trouble again."

In 1937 he tried again to escape. This time three men were killed and Clyde was wounded in the shoulder.

Finally, Clyde was placed in isolation in a concrete morgue. The walls were two feet thick. There were six concrete slabs for coffins. The only ventilation, and source of light, were two small holes opposite the steel door. They were about three inches in diameter and six feet apart. His toilet was a five-gallon bucket. He ate with his hands because he was not trusted with eating utensils. Weeks later a twelve-inch hole was cut in the steel door to provide more light.

From the morbid isolation of that morgue, Clyde asked for a Bible. He always assumed it was full of contradictions, but upon studying it, he found otherwise. There was only enough light to read for five hours a day. He made notes upon the wall and sought diligently to understand the Scriptures. The more he read, the more his faith grew. Ultimately he gave himself to Christ. Soon he was winning other inmates to Christ. His morgue became a meeting place for believers. Over the course of many years the reality of his conversion could not be denied. The "new" Clyde Thompson was as different from the old as a butterfly is from a caterpillar.

Clyde was pardoned by Gov. John Connally in 1963. To the day of his death, July 2, 1979, Clyde

continued to serve Christ and confound the skeptics. His amazing conversion provides a convincing commentary on statement of Scripture: **"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Cor. 5:17.)**

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33)

CHAPTER III

FOLLOW ME!

How vividly I recall a trip our family took to New York some years ago. Our second son, David, had been in Norway as an A.F.S. student. We were to pick him up at the airport in New York City. To save money, we borrowed a camper to go on the back of a pick up. The camper was equipped with a propane stove. I didn't realize that carrying propane would prevent us from using any of the tunnels. More than once we were forced to back along the side of a busy highway and seek an alternate route. After many diversions, we finally found a parkway that would take us directly to the airport. We were only a few miles from our destination when everyone started honking at us. Only then did I discover that campers were not allowed on this particular highway.

Another visit to a strange city was much more pleasant. By prior arrangement, a local resident met me at the edge of town. It was a simple matter to follow him to the place where I was supposed to be. I didn't have to worry about anything. All I had to do was follow my guide.

"Follow Me!" was the principal command which Jesus gave to His disciples. Jesus obtained His first disciples at Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing. John identified Jesus as the "Lamb of God," and two of his disciples heard him speak, and **"they followed Jesus" (John 1:37.)**

"The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me" (John 1:45.)

"And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him" (Matt. 4:18-19.)

"And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him" (Matt. 9:9.)

"Then said Jesus unto His disciples, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matt. 16:24.)

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27.)

"If any man serve me, let him follow me . . ." (John 12:26.)

Etc.

As we have said before, the Greek word "akoloutheo" is used 77 times in the Gospels of following Christ, and only once otherwise. The single exception is found in Mark 14:13. In this passage, Jesus sent two of His disciples into Jerusalem to make provisions for the Passover. Note, that he did not give them an address,

or a map, he gave them a guide to follow:

"And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guest chamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?" (Mark 14:13-14)

It is much easier to follow someone, than to follow directions. A man carrying a pitcher of water would be easy to find, for this normally was considered as women's work. Once discovered, it would be a simple matter for the disciples to follow him to the appropriate place.

There was something refreshing and simple about the words of Jesus. He spoke differently than did the scribes. Traditional Jewish thought was filled with confusion and complexity. In Rabbinic Judaism the Talmid (student,) gave himself to the whole of Jewish tradition. He sought to analyze both the oral and written Torah. He also tried to understand the traditions of the fathers, which included the Mishnah, Midrash, Halachah, and Haggadah.

Jesus cut through the fog and confusion of rabbinical thought and simply said: **"FOLLOW ME!"**

BOTH EASY AND HARD

Following Jesus was both easy and hard. It was easy from the standpoint that all they had to do was keep him in sight. It was hard because it required self denial.

In order to follow Jesus, the disciples had to "deny themselves." Peter, for example, was a fisherman. He also had a family. He undoubtedly had a hobby, or something which he did for recreation. Following Jesus required that he place the Lord's will before his own.

Peter once said:

"Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting" (Lk. 18:28-30.)

After the resurrection, Peter and other of the disciples, went fishing. Jesus appeared to them on the shore, and instructed them where to throw the net. Because of His guidance, they caught one hundred fifty three big fish without breaking the net.

It was on this occasion, before a fire, that Jesus challenged Peter to confess Him three times. (A short time before, also by a fire, Peter had denied Him three times.) Jesus said: **"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" (John 21:16.)** What did Jesus mean by "these?" Some have suggested that when Jesus spoke these words He beckoned with His hand. Nearby were those objects of earthly sentiment to which Peter had once dedicated his life. Did Peter love Jesus more than he loved his boat, and

his net, and his profession? Three times Peter confessed that he loved Jesus. Each time, in response, Jesus admonished him to take care of His sheep. Then Jesus said to Peter, **"Follow me!"** These words assume a new significance when it is remembered that they came from the resurrected Christ who would soon return to heaven.

Peter, like so many of us, wanted to know what someone else was supposed to do. He turned to John and said: **"And what shall this man do?"** Jesus said: **"If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me"** (John 21:22.)

It is a common temptation for us to take our eyes off Jesus and focus on someone else. It does not matter what someone else does, or does not do, we are to follow Jesus. We are to concentrate on what Jesus leads us to do.

THE NEED FOR DISCIPLINE

The word "disciple," and the word "discipline," are linguistically associated. To be a disciple, is to be disciplined.

Jesus is the perfect example of discipline. His entire public ministry lasted but three short years. On the cross He announced, "It is finished!" He had completed the work God gave Him to do. Nothing had been neglected, or forgotten. Every prophecy had been fulfilled and every minute detail had been accomplished to perfection. He was always on schedule, and on time. He never was lazy or irresponsible. He always had time for solitude and prayer. He was never indifferent and lackadaisical.

Those who followed Jesus had to be disciplined too in order to stay with Him. Those who could not stand the regimen, fell by the way side. His steps were so ordered by the Lord that no one followed Him by accident. Following Jesus required a deliberate decision, and a life of diligence, discipline, and self denial.

RELEASE FROM RITUAL

Ritualism was an integral part of Jewish worship. There were three major feasts which the devout Jew was required to attend. There were specific rituals for each feast. The common people were not allowed to conduct these ceremonies. The Tribe of Levi was set apart for this purpose. Those who deviated from the divine liturgy, died in the process. Nadab and Abihu, for example, offered strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not. **"And there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord"** (Lev. 10:2.)

Uzzah also died for disregarding the protocol of God. The Ark of the Covenant was never to be touched by man. It was to be carried on staves by Levites who were properly clothed and sanctified. Uzzah disregarded the instructions of God and placed the ark on an ox cart. When the oxen stumbled, the ark was about to fall, and Uzzah dared to touch it. The anger of the Lord was kindled against him, and he died. This remarkable story is found in II Sam. 6:, and I Chron. 13:. I Chron. 15:13 explains that this happened because they did not seek God "after the due order."

The Jews were not the only ones who sought God through rituals. A. H. Newman, writes in his Manual

of Church History, Vol. 1, p. 29:

"Religion with the Romans was never a matter of feeling, always a matter of form. The security of divine favor was thought to depend upon the exactitude with which all ceremonies were performed and all prayers uttered. The slightest mistake in word or gesture rendered the entire proceedings ineffective. The same rite was sometimes repeated thirty or even fifty times because of slight defects in utterance or manipulation."

The Romans worshiped by ritual in their temples throughout the world. The Samaritans worshiped by ritual on Mount Gerizim. The Jews worshiped by ritual in Jerusalem. Jesus, however, ushered in a new concept of worship. He told the Samaritan woman:

"Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, and now is, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father . . . But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshipers 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 4:21-24.)

This revolution in worship would not be compatible with any religion in the world, not even with Judaism. To try and combine Christianity with Judaism would be like putting new cloth in an old garment, or new wine in old skins.

New Testament worship involves an absence of ritual. Matthew records a number of times when Jesus was worshiped. Each example was spontaneous, and without a ritual of any kind.

- The wise men worshiped Him with gifts (Matt. 2:11.)
- A certain ruler with a sick child worshiped Him (Matt. 9:18.)
- The disciples worshiped Him in a boat (Matt. 14:33.)
- A Canaanite woman followed Him and worshiped (Matt. 15:25.)
- Women held Him by the feet and worshiped (Matt. 28:9.)
- The disciples worshiped Him on a mountain (Matt. 28:17.)

These examples are typical of other references to worship in the Gospels. New Testament worship is characterized by an absence of ritual.

NO RITUALS FOR HEALING

Jesus healed thousands of people in the course of His ministry. Consider this account:

"And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed

with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them. And there followed him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan (Matt. 4:23-25.)

Matthew records these healings without providing any specifics. We do not know "how," Jesus healed these infirmities.

When the Scriptures do provide details, however, it seems that Jesus treated every sick person differently. Take, for example, the healing of blind people. We have at least three instances recorded when Jesus healed blind people, and each healing was different.

Mark records the healing of a blind man near Bethsaida (Mk. 8:22-26.) First, Jesus took him by the hand and led him out of town. Perhaps He did this because Bethsaida was a citadel of unbelief (see Matt. 11:21.) Even the miracle working power of Jesus was affected by drenching doubt and pessimism (see Mk. 6:5-6.) Then Jesus spat on the blind man's eyes and touched him. The man, however, still could not see clearly. He saw men as trees walking. When Jesus touched him a second time, he saw clearly.

John records that Jesus healed a man born blind (see John 9:1-38.) This time Jesus did not spit in the blind man's eyes, He spat on the ground. Jesus then made clay of the spittle and anointed the eyes of the blind man. Finally, He commanded the blind man to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. When he did, he was healed.

The third case of blindness to be cured was that of Bartimaeus (see Mk. 10:46-52.) In this instance, it seems that Jesus had no physical contact with the blind man. He asked Bartimaeus what he wanted. He replied that he wanted to receive his sight. Jesus replied: **"Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole, and immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus in the way."**

There apparently was no formula, or ritual, for the healing of blindness. When the disciples encountered this problem, they had to seek God's present guidance to determine their course of action. They discovered that every experience, and every individual, was unique. They had to be spontaneous and trust in God to guide them, just as Jesus did.

The Bible does not give formulas, or rituals, for healing.

INTERRUPTIONS

The training of the twelve involved a great many interruptions. For example, as Jesus was teaching at a home in Capernaum, four men made a hole in the roof and lowered a paralyzed man into His presence (Mk. 2:1-12.) The Gospel writers tell us more about the "interruption," than the "lesson." Perhaps the interruption was the lesson. Jesus was teaching His disciples that all things are working together for those who love and are called according to His purpose. Since God knows the future, there are no real interruptions with Him. What great news! With God as our Guide, everything that happens becomes an occasion of praise.

Consider these "interruptions":

- As Jesus was going to raise Jairus' daughter, He was interrupted by a woman with an issue of blood who touched the hem of His garment (Matt. 9:20.)
- His sleep in a boat was interrupted by a storm (Matt. 8:24.)
- His trip to Gadara was interrupted by demoniacs (Matt. 8:28.)
- A Canaanite woman with a sick daughter interrupted Him (Matt. 15:22.)
- His meal in the home of Simon the Pharisee was interrupted by a woman of the streets. She washed His feet with tears and wiped them with the hair of her head (Lk. 7:36-50.)
- His journey to Jerusalem was interrupted by Blind Bartimaeus (Mk. 10:46-52.)
- His meal in the home of Simon the Leper was interrupted by a woman who put very precious ointment upon His head (Matt. 26:6-13.)
- Etc.

These examples could easily be multiplied. Everything that happened to Jesus became an open door to preach and teach. Every circumstance, and every "interruption," no matter how bad it seemed at the time, turned out to be something good. This even includes the cross. We now know that through death, Jesus destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil.

As we read the Acts, and the Epistles, we see that the Apostles of Jesus also had victory in every circumstance. No matter what happened to them, it always turned out to be something good. Truly, all things do work together for the good to those who love God and are the called according to His purpose (Rom. 8:28.)

When we are busy with our own plans, we may resent interruptions of any kind. It is fair to ask, however, did the work of God interrupt Moses taking care of the sheep, or did Moses taking care of the sheep interrupt the work of God?

IMITATORS OF GOD

The Scriptures teach in Ephesians 5:1, that we are to be imitators of God as dear children. The Greek word translated as "imitators," is "mimetes," from which we get our English word "mimic." It is always used in a good sense. Almost everything we learn in life, we learn by imitating someone else. The ultimate challenge, of course, is to be an imitator of God.

Michael Griffiths wrote about this in his book, THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS (p. 35.)

"It is possible to be overfamiliar with great truths: but this really is an absolutely devastating one, a totally mind boggling concept that takes the breath away. We scruffy, frail mortals, whose hair and teeth fall out, who look in our mirrors to see the lines, creases and blotches marking out inevitable progress towards senility and decay; we empty, shallow,

morally bankrupt people, totally impoverished in spirit, self doubting, 'non events,' are to be remade in a godlike mould, into the image of Christ, glowing with glory and divine vitality. It is a glorious doctrine which is rarely presented to non Christians: if it were made more of in evangelism people would begin to see what God is doing for people in the world he has created, and come stampeding into the Christian family. 'Eternal Life' seems a relatively feeble concept by comparison, even though it is saying the same thing in other, less contemporary words."

A HELPER

Many of us find it difficult to function without help. We are good workers, but need help and guidance. Even college graduates often need help. Sometimes this help comes from old notes taken in the classroom. Other times we face some new challenge, or problem, which the professors never told us about. In times like these we need someone with more wisdom and experience to guide us through our difficulties.

Jesus promised both kinds of help to His disciples. First, He promised that the Holy Spirit would **"bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26.)**

Second, the Holy Spirit would come to them as a Companion. He would not only help them remember lessons from the past, He would also help them with new information for the present and the future (see John 16:13.) The Bible word which Jesus used to describe the Holy Spirit is "paraklesis." It is a compound of two words, "para" beside, and "kaleo" to call. The Holy Spirit would be like someone called by their side to help.

But the Holy Spirit would even do much more than this. He would not only be a "Helper," working beside them, He would be a source of energy and wisdom from within. One Bible word used to describe this power is "dumanis." It is the basis of our English word "dynamo." The Holy Spirit is a perennial source of energy and strength.

CHRIST IN YOU

In Old Testament times, God is represented as separate from man. When Moses, for example, was in the presence of God, his face would glow. When he left the presence of God, the glory, would fade (II Cor. 3:13.)

The Tabernacle anticipated a transition to the New Testament. It featured a portable altar. As far as I know, this was the first such altar in the world. Man no longer had to go great distances to worship. The Tabernacle was in their midst. God was dwelling in the midst of His people.

The genius of the New Covenant, however, is far more wonderful than this. Now, God does not dwell in the midst of a nation, he dwells personally in every believer. Now, our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19.) Now, the glory of God need never fade from our face. Now, we don't have to go to a special place to worship. Now, we can worship God wherever we are, for true worship is in spirit and in truth. This message is so radical and revolutionary that no eye had seen it, no ear had heard it, and it had never entered into the heart of man (I Cor.2:9.) Angels desired to look into this matter but were not permitted to do so (I Pet.2:12.) The principalities and powers in heavenly places observe with amazement the manifold wisdom

of God (Eph. 3:10.)

Jesus alluded to our perennial source of power in His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well:

"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14.)

Later, He spoke about it again at the Feast of Tabernacles:

"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)" (John 7:38-39.)

"Christ in you," is not a peripheral issue. This is the hope of Glory (Col. 1:27.) This is the way that God provides us with Eternal Life.

PREPARING A PLACE

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus promised His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them. The Greek word used to describe this place is "mone." It is only found two times in the Bible. In John 14:2 it is translated in the KJV as "mansions." In John 14:23 it is translated as "abode." In the first instance Jesus promised to prepare a place for us. In the second, we are to prepare a place for Him. The Scriptures teach that if we love Jesus, we will keep His words, and He and the Father will come and make their "abode" with us. They will dwell in our hearts by faith.

When we prepare a place for human guests, we clean the house and try to make a good impression. We cram clutter into the closet and sweep things under the rug. This is NOT the way to prepare a place for God.

The Scriptures teach that God wants to honor those who have a humble and contrite heart. The Hebrew word for "contrite," is "dakka." It comes from the root word which means to "crumble" or be "crushed." God is Omniscient. He knows everything. He sees everything which we have hidden in the closet or swept under the rug. He loves us in spite of our sin and does not want us to be hypocritical. He prefers for us to receive Him, just the way we are. Note these words of Isaiah 57:15:

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite man."

The Lord offered a beautiful invitation to the lukewarm church in Laodicea. They thought they were

rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing. God knew that they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. In spite of their pitiful condition, Jesus still yearned to make his "abode" with them. He said:

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20.)

W. CARL KETCHERSIDE

The late W. Carl Ketcherside was born in a crude miner's cabin on May 10, 1908. He was a gifted child. He was promoted to the second grade in only two weeks, and to the third by Christmas. He was permitted to borrow only four books from the travelling library. In four days he read each book two times and eagerly awaited the next arrival of the library. Later in life he averaged reading a book a day for seven years.

Carl began preaching at the age of twelve and remained a popular speaker until the time of his death in 1989. He authored 34 books and was the subject of two Master Theses and three Doctoral Dissertations.

One reason for such interest in his life was the dramatic change which came over him in 1951. Up to that point in time, he was a partisan leader of a narrow faction. Afterward, he became a recognized champion for the cause of Christian unity.

The scene was Belfast, North Ireland. God used that place of bitter fighting to break through the sectarian barrier on Carl's heart. For the first time he saw his ministry through the eyes of Jesus. He had been a "piece maker," and not a "peace maker." The Holy Spirit brought to his mind the invitation of Christ to the church in Laodicea. Suddenly he realized that this invitation was not for alien sinners, but lukewarm Christians. Though Carl had been preaching for more than forty years, he saw himself as spiritually desolate and miserable. His Penniel came that night as he knelt on the stone floor of an unheated church house. A deep snow was on the ground outside. For more than an hour he agonized in prayer while the persistent Christ continued to knock. Finally, he could stand it no longer. He opened his heart to Jesus, and Jesus did exactly what He said He would do.

Carl described his life as a "Pilgrimage of Joy." Late in life he sold his home and moved into an apartment in the inner city of St. Louis. He died while working with the "least of these our brethren." Who can doubt that the finale of his life came because he was following Jesus. A short time before his death he wrote these poignant words:

"The crying need of our age is for men filled with the Spirit of God, men who dare to break with tradition, and if need be, die for the vision which they have cherished, until now it nourishes them. The call of God is borne upon every whispering breeze to those who have been enslaved by partisan positions, fettered by fears of reprisal, shackled by bigotry and littleness. The world will not be won to the Christ of a national ideal, to a white man's God, a denominational dogma, or a parochial creed.

Jesus is not the shepherd of a sect but of the whole flock of God. He is not the Lord of a faction but of the whole church of the redeemed ones. A concept which embraces

anything less than the ultimate unity of all who believe in Him as one mighty army, is too meager to match his prayer, and will be self-defeating. There is no power in the universe by which we can reduce the body of Christ into a faction or expand any faction into the body of Christ.

We reject the spurious proposal that we must remain apart and at sword's points until we have argued every action of every faction, debated every detail of every dogma, and reached conformity on every conclusion of every complaint among us. This is the sectarian way. It is the way of prolonged strife and drawn out dissension. We are not called to feud to the death but to find the life that is in Christ Jesus. Our peace is not in a program, a proposition, or a platform. It is in a person. 'He is our peace who hath made both one.' The way to have unity is to unite, not to have a debate. We cannot argue ourselves into agreement nor debate ourselves out of division! In all of our decades of debate we have not overthrown or eliminated a single sect, but we have created a great many new ones!

Let us resolve to make way for the Spirit and we will find the path of peace. The Spirit of God will not divide the family of God. It is men who are devoid of the Spirit who set up divisions. If we will allow the Spirit to have his way with us, we will be united in the way with Him. We must cease getting in the Spirit's way, and start walking in the way of the Spirit."

F. B. Meyer offers this wise counsel to those who want to be led by the Spirit.

"Never act in panic, nor allow man to dictate to you; calm yourself and be still; force yourself into the quiet of your closet until the pulse beats normally and the scare has ceased to disturb. When you are most eager to act is the time when you will make the most pitiable mistakes. Do not say in your heart what you will or will not do, but wait upon God until he makes known His way. So long as that way is hidden, it is clear that there is not need of action, and that He accounts Himself responsible for all the results of keeping you where you are."

CHAPTER IV

THE GREAT COMMISSION

Before proceeding to the book of Acts, it is appropriate that we pause briefly and take another look at the Great Commission. It is called the "Great Commission," because there were more limited ones before it. Here, for example, is an earlier commission recorded in Matt. 10:5-6:

"These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"

The "Great Commission," by contrast, was to all nations. The Greek word translated as "nations," is "ethnos." This word is found 162 times in the N.T. Scriptures, and 93 times it is translated as "Gentiles." It should have been crystal clear to the Apostles that Jesus was sending them to the gentiles, but it was not. This makes the promise of Christ to be with His apostles very important. Without His direct guidance and intervention, they would not have preached to the gentiles.

Matthew recorded the Great Commission with these words:

"And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matt. 28:18-20)

Before proceeding let us consider another fact which is not immediately evident to the English reader. Gramatically speaking, there is only one imperative in the Greek text of the Great Commission. It is the Greek word "mathateusate." This is the 2nd pers. pl. aor. 1, imper. act. of "matheuo." This word is translated as "teach" in the King James Version, but later versions render it "make disciples." The Greek word for "disciple" is "mathetes." It comes from "manthano," which means "to learn," and is the basis of our English word "math." The Dictionary of New Testament Theology states that the noun "mathetes" occurs 264 times in the N.T. (Exclusively in the Gospels and Acts.)

It is interesting that the disciples of Jesus were commanded to "make disciples," yet never used the word "disciple" in their epistles. A similar word "manthano," which means "to learn" is found 25 times in the N.T. Scriptures.

ALL POWER

It is not by accident that Jesus told His disciples that He had "all power," just before giving them The Great Commission. We live in a "universe," and not a "multiverse." God is the Creator, and designed the universe so that everything revolves around Him. The very essence of godliness is to place God at the center of our lives, and let everything revolve around Him. The very essence of sin is to place ourselves in the center,

and have everything revolve around us. Someone has defined sin as: "I want, what I want, when I want it."

It is my view that the original sin was not in Eden, but in the heavens. Isaiah made reference to it with these words:

"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! FOR THOU HAST SAID IN THINE HEART, I WILL EXALT MY THRONE ABOVE THE STARS OF GOD: I WILL SIT ALSO UPON THE MOUNT OF THE CONGREGATION, IN THE SIDES OF THE NORTH: I WILL ASCEND ABOVE THE HEIGHTS O THE CLOUDS; I WILL BE LIKE THE MOST HIGH" (Is. 14:12-14.)

The words of Isaiah have more than one application. They not only applied to the devil, but also to the King of Babylon who was guided by satanic influence. This satanic self centeredness has been manifest millions of times in the history of the world. Note these words of Karl Marx in his poem "Human Pride."

With disdain I will throw my gauntlet
Full in the face of the world,
And see the collapse of this pygmy giant
Whose fall will not stifle my ardour.

Then will I wander godlike and victorious
Through the ruins of the world
And giving my words an active force,
I will feel equal to the Creator.

A similar mentality was manifest in the life of the late Robert Maxwell. The November 1992 Reader's Digest described him as the greatest thief in British history. He was said to have stolen at least \$1.65 billion from public companies, including \$795 million from the pension funds of his own employees. It has been suggested that he even "ripped off" Mother Teresa for \$300,000. Early in his life he fell prey to the fatal malady of self-worship. One of his workers said: "Maxwell was the sun, and we either were planets or had to leave." Touche! This is the same imagery used by Isaiah to describe the fall of Lucifer.

Maxwell boarded his luxurious yacht a final time on October 31, 1991. Five days later his body was discovered floating in the water. It is assumed that he took his own life. If he did so, he joins a sad company of other self centered individuals who died the same way. The long list of suicides includes such notables as Nero, Hannibal, Cleopatra, Judas Iscariot, Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels, Goering, Jim Jones, and David Karesh. Someone compared the life of Jesus with that of Alexander the Great by means of this stunning contrast. Jesus was killed by the world at thirty three, and He conquered it. Alexander the Great conquered the world at thirty three, and it killed him. There is no excuse, or substitute, for a life that does not revolve around Jesus.

As the disciples began their mission, it was essential that everything focus on Jesus. It is easy, even in the course of evangelism, to lose sight of Christ and rely on form and tradition. Samuel M. Shoemaker spoke to this danger with these eloquent words:

"Religion, when it is fresh and vital, is never afraid either of the cost or of the possible risk of direct inspiration; but when it cools it wants rules and systems, wants to avoid the personal searching which is needed to find direct inspiration, wants to avoid the clash with the conventional world and the conventional church, and the hazard to one's own personal security which is incidental upon living in the Spirit. Jesus did not let men rest content with memories. He made them look forward to a time when His human voice would be withdrawn, and the command of His lips could be no longer heard; when His Church was to be dependent upon the Holy Spirit, who should call to our minds the things He said, take of the things of Christ and show them to the world in fresh ways which the world could understand. The Holy Spirit's guidance will never be contrary to the New Testament: it will really show us what the New Testament means for us in any given case."

Biblical faith is more "personal," than "propositional." It is more important to know "who" you believe, than "what" you believe.

TAKE MY YOKE AND LEARN OF ME

Jesus said:

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30.)

Permit me to narrow our focus and comment on only two aspects of this beautiful invitation.

First, let us focus on the yoke which we receive from Jesus. William Barclay tells of an ancient legend that Jesus, the Carpenter, made the best yokes in all of Galilee. He suggested that each yoke was custom fit. A six hundred pound animal would need a different yoke from one that weighed 1,200 pounds. He then points out that the Greek word translated as "easy," is "chrestos," which can mean "well-fitting." If your yoke does not fit well, perhaps you did not get it from Jesus.

Second, those who come to Jesus can expect to be taught **BY** Him. There is a great deal of difference in learning about Jesus, and learning from Jesus. Jesus promised those who came to Him would learn from Him. This is made clear in the NIV, the New King James, the Living Bible, The New English Bible, the New American Standard Bible, and a wide variety of other versions. The Bible in Basic English even renders the words of Jesus as **"and let Me be your teacher."**

LO, I AM WITH YOU

Jesus promised His disciples that He would not abandon them like orphans. He promised that He would never leave them, or forsake them. He promised that He would be with them unto the end of the age.

The promise of the presence of Christ is not just for the Apostles, it is for all Christians. Consider, for example, the promise of Hebrews 13:5 **"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."** The versatile

Greek language has more than one way of saying "no." Perhaps the strongest is the simple denial "ou." Dana and Mantey in their Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament, call this a "clear-cut, point-blank, negative, objective, final." As strong as it is, however, it can be strengthened by adding "me." "Ou me" is a double negative which means, "no, not by any means." The promise of Jesus in Hebrews 13:5 contains the double negative "ou me" two times. Sandwiched in between them is "oude," which means "neither, nor, or not even." Thus Matthew Henry observes: "Here are no less than five negatives heaped together, to confirm the promise, the true believer shall have the gracious presence of God with him in life, at death, and forever."

The importance of His presence is emphasized by a familiar proverb: **"Where there is no vision the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he" (Prov. 29:18.)** The Hebrew word in this verse which is translated as "vision" is "chazown." This is the normal word for prophetic revelation. This passage is not talking about human dreams, it is teaching the importance of divine revelation. The word translated as "perish," is "para." It is from a primary word which means "to loosen." This is the word translated as "naked" in Ex. 32:25. On this occasion, Moses returned from the presence of God and discovered that the people were totally unrestrained. The Hebrew word "para," was used to describe their orgy. The King James version translated it as "naked," other translations say "broken loose."

The Scriptures teach that without divine guidance, the people become ungovernable.

We should not be surprised, therefore, to discover that Jesus promised His disciples not to leave them without divine guidance. He promised to be with them always. He would never leave them, or forsake them. One example of His patient guidance involves preaching to the gentiles. This had always been the plan of God, and was the subject of many predictions by the prophets. It was, however, not immediately understood by the disciples.

As we have said, Matthew's account of the Great Commission commanded them to preach to "all nations." Mark records the same command with the words "every creature" (Mk. 16:15.) Luke also wrote: "all nations" (Lk. 24:47.) In the book of Acts, Luke was even more specific, mentioning Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8.)

In retrospect, it is obvious to us that Jesus was sending His apostles to the gentiles. It was, however, not obvious to them. At the time, they sincerely believed that every gentile would have to become a Jew, before becoming a Christian. For many years they preached to "none but Jews only" (Acts 11:19.) Remember, however, that Jesus promised to be with them. He promised not to leave them as orphans. He promised to return as the Holy Spirit and guide them into all truth. This is precisely what He did, and the book of Acts tells us about it. In our next chapter we will deal with this in greater detail. We will study the way that a reluctant Peter was guided by a patient Christ to preach to the gentiles. We will also point out that Paul was called to be an apostle to the gentiles. For now, however, it will be sufficient to merely remind you that the Great Commission carried with it the promise of help. Jesus promised not to abandon His disciples. He promised to be with them unto the end of the world.

At the risk of being redundant, making disciples is the imperative. Certainly they were to go, and to baptize, and to teach, but the principal command of their commission was to make disciples. This is not the same thing as establishing churches. It is possible to establish churches without making disciples. True disciples, however, will congregate as churches. God is not the Author of confusion. Those who are born

again have the Holy Spirit helping them to live orderly lives. True disciples are new creatures. They are led by the Spirit. They are a part of the Body of Jesus Christ. They are an organism, not an organization. They are "living stones" in a spiritual house.

Paul wrote:

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. 2:18-22.)

Peter concurred and wrote:

"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 2:5.)

The influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit is essential in a building constructed of "living stones." The true tabernacle is pitched by God, and not man. Without help from heaven the church would have been confused and ineffective. Without the Head, the Body would be out of control. Without the Holy Spirit, His unlettered apostles would have been miserable failures. Before the Holy Spirit came, these men were timid and insecure. Matthew records that just before their commission, "some doubted" (Matt. 28:17.) Mark reveals that just before the commission, Jesus appeared to the eleven and "upbraided them for their unbelief and hardness of heart" (Mk. 16:14.) Luke concurs and wrote that "they believed not for joy" (Lk. 24:41.) John said they assembled and shut the door, for fear of the Jews (John 20:19.)

This is why Jesus commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem until they had received the promise of the Father. On their own, they were weak and ineffective. Once they received the Holy Spirit, however, they were filled with boldness. It was power from on high that enabled them to witness from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth. When Peter and John were arrested for preaching the Gospel, the rulers, elders, and scribes were impressed by their boldness (Acts 4:13.) **"God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love and of a sound mind" (II Tim. 1:7.)**

MARTYRS

Our English word "martyr," comes from the Greek word "martus," which means "witness." History testifies with a united voice that these men ultimately did precisely what Christ commanded them to do. They went into all the world and preached the Gospel to every creature. In the process of doing so, most of them died as martyrs. Eusebius notes that they divided the world among themselves, and set forth to all points of the compass. The same Jesus who guided them to catch fish in the Sea of Galilee, helped them to become fishers of men. He guided them throughout the world. They were so successful that by the time Paul wrote to the Colossians, he could say that the Gospel had been preached to " . . . **every creature under**

heaven" (Col. 1:23.)

John Foxe, in his book "Christian Martyrs," points out that:

- Matthew was killed with the sword in Parthia about A.D. 60.
- Mark was dragged through the streets of Alexandria and then burned.
- James the Less was stoned to death.
- Matthias was first stoned, and then beheaded.
- Andrew was crucified.
- Peter was crucified head downward.
- Paul was beheaded.
- Jude was crucified.
- Bartholemew was either killed with the sword or beaten to death.
- Thomas was thrust through with a spear.
- Simon was crucified.
- John was tortured and imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos.

These are just a few of many thousands who died for their faith. Just because someone dies for something does not make it true. It does, however, indicate that they believed it was true. The martyrdom of the apostles is strong evidence that they believed what they preached. They claimed to be eye witnesses of the resurrected Christ, and they died without recanting one syllable of their testimony. They are indeed good and credible witnesses. The reality of their testimony is not only confirmed by their success in evangelism, but also by the transformation that took place in their own lives.

John wrote:

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us" (I John 1:1-2.)

In the book of Revelation, John described the uncompromising faith of believers with these dramatic words:

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Rev. 12:11.)

CHAPTER V

GUIDANCE IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

- It is obvious that the disciples followed Jesus while He was with them upon the earth.
- It is equally obvious that Jesus went away to a place where they could not follow. He said: **"Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now . . . " (John 13:36.)**
- It cannot be denied that Jesus promised to come back as a Spirit and guide His disciples. This is a central theme of the Upper Room Discourse, as well as many other passages of Scripture (John 13:31 - 16:33, etc.)
- The book of Acts begins by affirming that the Gospels only record what Jesus "began" to do and teach (Acts 1:1.) Luke's inspired history contains the continuation of Christ's ministry by means of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus specifically commanded His Apostles not to depart from Jerusalem until they have received the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4.) Luke wrote:

"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 . . . 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 Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:4,8.)

- The book of Acts is a record of the way that the Holy Spirit guided the Apostles.

CASTING LOTS

The Scriptures teach that a successor to Judas was selected by casting lots. This happened in the upper room before the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost. This is the last mention of casting lots in the Bible. Peter concluded from his Bible study, that David had predicted the betrayal of Jesus (Acts 1:16-18.) He also concluded that another should take his place (Acts 1:20.)

The process of elimination began with strict qualifications. The man who would take the place of Judas, had to have been with the Apostles from the baptism of John until the ascension. He also had to have been a witness of the resurrection.

Two men were put forth, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. They prayed **"and they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles" (Acts 1:26.)** The Holy Spirit evidently honored this choice, for hereafter the Apostles are referred to as "the twelve" (Acts 6:2.)

The casting of lots was a time honored way of seeking the will of God. It seems that the Jewish High Priest did so. He wore what was called "a breastplate of judgment." The front of this breastplate had a pouch which contained the urim and thummim stones. These stones were used to discern the will of God. Since we have no record of their beginning, some have assumed that they were used by the patriarchs before the time of Moses. Nor can we speak with certainty about what they were like. At any rate, they were unquestionably a part of Hebrew worship. Moses wrote:

"And thou shalt put in the breastplate of judgment the Urim and the Thummim; and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the Lord; and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel upon his heart before the Lord continually" (Ex. 28:30.)

The word "urim" comes from the Hebrew "arar" and means "to curse." The word "thummim" comes from "tamam," and means "to be perfect." Some have assumed that these were two stones, and that each stone had two sides. When seeking the will of God the priest would cast the stones from the Ephod. If the two "yes" sides were up, the Lord's answer was yes. If the two "no" sides were up the answer was no. If there was one "yes" and one "no," the Lord was not giving an answer. This would help to explain I Sam. 28:6: **"And Saul enquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets."**

Here are a few examples from the Bible of casting lots:

- Aaron cast lots to select the scape goat (Lev. 16:8.)
- Achan was found to be a thief by casting lots (Josh. 7:14.)
- The inheritance of the Hebrew people in Canaan was determined by casting lots (Josh. 18:6-10.)
To this very day we refer to a portion of ground as a "lot."
- Saul was selected as king by lot (I Sam. 10:20-21.)
- Jonathan was found to have disobeyed Saul's command by casting lots (I Samuel 14:42.)
- Jonah was discovered to be the source of God's anger by casting lots (Jonah 1:7.)
- See also I Chron. 25:8; 26:13-14; Neh. 10:34; II:1; Psa. 22:18; Joel 3:3; Obadiah 1:11; Nahum 3:10; etc.

The process of casting lots was cumbersome and time consuming. Sometimes the priest with the sacred stones was many miles away. Sometimes he may have not been available to help. It is thrilling and exciting to realize that we no longer have to journey to Jerusalem to know the will of God. God makes his abode within us. We are God's "lot," or "heritage."

The Greek word for "lot" is "kleros." This is the basis of our English word "clergy." The Bible uses this word to refer to all of God's people. I Peter 5:3, for example, admonishes elders not to lord it over God's

"heritage," but to be examples to the flock. This word "heritage," is the word "kleros," or "clergy." All God's people are His special inheritance, or clergy, not just preachers.

PENTECOST

As we mentioned before, there were three feasts which the Jewish man was required by law to attend.

"Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the Lord empty" (Deut. 16:16.)

The Feast of Weeks was called "Pentecost" because it fell on the fiftieth day after the wave offering of the Passover (Lev. 23:16.) The word "Pentecost" comes from "pentekonta" which means "fifty."

The Scriptures teach: **"And there were dwelling at Jerusalem, Jews, devout men out of every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5.)** These men had come to the Passover, and remained in Jerusalem until Pentecost. It was on this day that the Holy Spirit came. Please study reverently the second chapter of Acts. The prophets had predicted this (Acts 2:16-21.) John the Baptist had predicted this (Matt. 3:11.) Jesus had predicted this (Lk. 24:49, John 14:- 16:, Acts 1:4-8, etc.) This experience was of pivotal importance in the lives of the apostles. It empowered them, and gave them boldness. After they received the Holy Spirit they had the courage to go from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

SOME OF THE WAYS GOD GUIDED IN ACTS

It is with some reluctance that the following list is presented. Before reading the list, please consider the following:

- God is infinite, and we are finite. We must avoid the erroneous idea that we can ever completely understand God. Paul expressed it beautifully: **"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! (Rom. 11:33)**

- Consider the vastness of the universe. On a clear night man can only see about 2,500 stars with the naked eye. With the aid of a telescope, however, we have discovered billions of stars. In fact, some of what we once thought were "stars," turned out to be whole galaxies. Scientists now think there are hundreds of billions of stars. The universe is so vast, however, that no one knows how many stars there are. Since the Creator is obviously greater than the universe He created, it is ridiculous for finite man to place any restrictions upon Him. Jesus said it like this: **"The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God" (Lk. 18:27.)**

- The Scriptures are "God breathed," or "inspired." They are like a living seed. The Word of God will grow and produce fruit when it is planted in good soil. While the Bible remains the same, our understanding of it does not. It is therefore possible for us to be constantly learning new truths from an old Scripture. Our

children will undoubtedly learn truths from the Bible which we have never seen.

- As we have said before, the Gospel of Luke only records what Jesus "began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1.) The book of Acts is a continuation of His ministry by means of the Holy Spirit. The chronology of Acts concludes with Paul in a Roman prison, but the ministry of the Holy Spirit did not stop there. The Holy Spirit is eternal, and His ministry will never end. What Jesus began to do in the body, the Body continues to do in Jesus.

With this brief disclaimer, let us proceed to consider some of the ways that God guided His people in the book of Acts.

I

SCRIPTURES

It is difficult for modern man to understand the devotion of the Hebrew people to the Word of God. Serious students began by memorizing the book of Leviticus, and many could recite all the books of Moses. The Word of God became an integral part of everything they did. When Jesus, for example, was tempted by the Devil to turn stones into bread, He quoted the Scriptures: **"It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4.)** Each time Jesus was tempted He quoted a Scripture. This was what every Jew was supposed to do.

In addition to the training which the apostles received in their homes, and synagogues, they also had three years of special training by Jesus. Jesus not only expounded the Scriptures to them, He sent the Holy Spirit to enable them to remember everything He taught them (John 14:26.) We should not be surprised, therefore, to find constant reference to the Scriptures in the book of Acts. Consider this partial list of references to Scripture and the word of Jesus in the book of Acts:

- Acts 1:2 - Matt. 28:19
- Acts 1:4 - Lk. 24:49
- Acts 1:5 - Matt. 3:11
- Acts 1:16 - Ps. 41:9
- Acts 1:20 - Ps. 69:25
- Acts 2:16-21 - Joel 2:28-30, Zech. 12:10
- Acts 2:25 - Ps. 16:8
- Acts 2:30 - II Sam. 7:12-13, Ps. 132:11
- Acts 2:33 - Jn. 14:26
- Acts 2:34 - Ps. 110:1
- Acts 3:18 - Is. 50:6
- Acts 3:22 - Deut. 18:15
- Acts 3:25 - Gen. 12:3
- Etc.

Apostolic preaching was filled with references to the Hebrew Scriptures. Consider the words of Stephen in Acts 7: and the words of Paul in Acts 13:16-41, as examples. The Bereans were said to be more

noble than those in Thessalonica, because **"they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11.)**

If you want to know the will of God, it is imperative that you study the Word of God. Christians in the First Century were diligent students of the Scriptures, and this was obviously one of the primary ways that God provided them with guidance.

Those who are immature in their knowledge of Scripture can be tossed to and fro by deceivers (Eph. 4:14.) Those who are "unlearned," and "unstable," may wrest the Scriptures unto their own destruction (II Pet. 3:16.)

One of the primary ways that God guided His people in the book of Acts was by means of Scripture!

II

CIRCUMSTANCES

God also guided His people in the book of Acts by circumstances. We must not think of history as random occurrences happening by accident. The Scriptures teach that God "worketh all things after the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11.) No matter what happens: **"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28.)** As in the story of Job, nothing can happen to the Christian without special permission from God.

Consider:

- A man asking alms occasioned a healing (3:1ff.)
- The healing brought about a sermon
- The sermon brought persecution
- Persecution led to the death of Stephen (7:59-60.)
- Persecution scattered the church (8:1)
- They that were scattered went everywhere preaching the word (8:4.)
- Persecution caused the unconverted Saul to go to Damascus (Acts 9:2.)
- Persecution caused the converted Saul to leave Damascus (9:23-25.)
- Persecution caused him to leave Jerusalem (9:29-30.)
- A famine set the stage to unite Jews and Gentiles (11:28-30.)
- Persecution drove Paul from Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (14:)
- An earthquake resulted in converting a jailer (16:25-34.)
- Etc.

Nothing was happening to these people by accident. Nothing that happened to them turned out to be bad. Murmuring in the church brought the first deacons. Persecution brought evangelism. Earthquakes, famines, storms, and shipwrecks were orchestrated by God into some beautiful benefit for the Gospel. Paul put it like this:

"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that

loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39.)

III

ANGELS

The word "angel" is found 201 times in the Bible, and "angels" 93 times. The disciples learned a great deal about angels from Jesus. Angels, as you know, were very much involved in the Christmas story. Angels made announcements to Zacharias, Mary, and the Shepherds. An angel directed Joseph to flee to Egypt, and later to return to Nazareth. Angels ministered to Jesus in the wilderness temptations and in His agony in Gethsemane. Angels rejoice when one sinner repents. The little ones have angels who always behold the face of the Father. Jesus said that more than twelve legions of angels were waiting for instructions from Him. An angel rolled away the stone when Jesus was resurrected. Two angels were sitting in the tomb, one at the head, and the other at the feet of the place where Jesus had lain. An angel spoke to the women and said: **"Fear not, for I know ye seek Jesus, which was crucified."** When Jesus ascended into heaven, two men stood by the disciples in white apparel. Many think these men were angels. They said: **"Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."**

At this time, however, we are going to narrow our focus to the book of Acts. We are talking about the guidance of God, and it is obvious that angels were used by God to give guidance to His people. Consider these passages:

- Acts 5:19ff - An angel liberated the apostles from prison and told them to go stand and speak in the temple all the words of this life.
- Acts 8:26 - An angel directed Philip to leave Samaria, and to go to a deserted road between Jerusalem and Gaza.
- Acts 10:3 - An angel directed Cornelius to send to Joppa for Simon Peter. He promised that Peter would tell him what he ought to do.
- Acts 12:7ff. - An angel delivered Peter from prison and death.
- Acts 12:23 - An angel smote Herod because he did not give glory to God.
- Acts 27:23 - An angel spoke to Paul in a storm and assured him that he would not die, but would be brought before Caesar.

The Scriptures teach that angels are **"ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who are the heirs of salvation" (Heb. 1:14.)**

IV

PROPHETS

The Bible has a great deal to say about prophets. Prophets did not always predict the future, but they did speak the message of God. The early church was not only guided by the inspired message of the Old Testament prophets, but by contemporary prophets as well. The church was built upon a "foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Eph. 2:20.) Paul wrote that God had "set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets (I Cor. 12:28.) He also wrote that the Lord gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints for the work of ministering (Eph. 4:11.)

Here are a few references to prophets in the book of Acts:

- Joel predicted that in the latter days that sons and daughters would prophesy (Acts 2:17.)
- Acts 11:27-30 - Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, named Agabus, signified by the Spirit that there would be a famine throughout all the world. Based on this information, the disciples determined to send relief to the brethren in Judea.
- Acts 13:1-4 - Five prophets and teachers are named in the church at Antioch. While these men fasted and prayed, the Holy Spirit said to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work God had called them to.
- Acts 13:6 - a sorcerer, named Bar-Jesus, is called a false prophet.
- Acts 15:32 - Judas and Silas, being prophets, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.
- Acts 16:1-3 - Paul selected Timothy to be his companion in travel. I Tim. 1:18 reveals that Timothy was selected for this honor by of prophetic utterance.
- Acts 19:6 - Paul laid hands on some disciples and they spoke with tongues and prophesied.
- Acts 20:23 - The Holy Spirit testified in every city that bonds and afflictions were waiting on Paul.
- Acts 21:7 - Philip, the evangelist, had four virgin daughters which did prophesy.
- Acts 21:10-14 - Agabus, the prophet, bound his hands and feet with Paul's girdle and predicted that Paul would be thus bound in Jerusalem.

V

VISIONS

- Acts 2:17 - Joel predicted that "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions."

- Acts 9:1-6 - Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus. He commanded him to go into the city and it would be told him what he must do.

- Acts 9:10-21 - The Lord appeared to Ananias in a vision. He instructed him to go to a street called Straight and heal Saul of his blindness.

- Acts 10:3 - Cornelius received a vision that told him to send for Peter, who would tell him what to do.

- Acts 10:9-18 - The Lord gave Peter a vision of many animals, reptiles, and birds that he was supposed to eat.

- Acts 10:19 - While Peter thought on the vision the Spirit told him that three men were seeking for him. He was to go with them, nothing doubting, for God had sent them.

- Acts 11:5 - Paul described his vision to those who were of the circumcision.

- Acts 12:9 - When Peter was delivered from prison by an angel, he initially thought it was a vision.

- Acts 16:9-10 - After the Holy Spirit would not let Paul preach in Asia, or Bithynia, he came to Troas. Here he received a vision of a man of Macedonia asking for his help. He reflected on the vision and concluded that God was calling him to preach the Gospel in Macedonia.

- Acts 18:9 - The Lord spoke to Paul in a vision and said: **"Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city."**

- Acts 26:19 - Paul told Agrippa that he was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.

VI

THIS LIST IS NOT COMPLETE

Jesus was baptized when he was about thirty years old (Lk. 3:23.) His public ministry lasted about three years. John reflected on the many things that happened in only this brief time and wrote:

"And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen" (John 21:25.)

As we have pointed out before, the Gospels only record what Jesus "began" to do and teach. What Jesus began to do in the Body, the Body continues to do in Jesus. The same Holy Spirit that operated in Jesus

during His earthly ministry, continues to operate in the church. In His physical body, Jesus could only be one place at a time, but His church can circle the globe. This is at least one reason why it was expedient for Him to go away. As a Spirit, Jesus can be everywhere.

Though we have already mentioned this many times, it still bears repetition and emphasis. Focus again on these words of Jesus to Nicodemus:

"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8.)

Jesus has been filling people with His Spirit for nearly 2,000 years. Certainly we should never claim to have exhausted all of the ways that the Holy Spirit can, or cannot work. God is Infinite, and we are not. The finite mind cannot comprehend "eternity," or "infinity." Neither can we fully understand God.

Believers have a special relationship with Christ which others do not. Acts 19:13-20 tells of seven sons of a Jew named Sceva, who tried to cast out an evil spirit by using the name of Jesus. The evil spirit answered: **"Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?"** The man with the evil spirit leaped upon them and overcame them. They fled naked and wounded. We must always approach involvement in the spirit world with great humility.

The book of Acts does not tell everything that happened. It contains some of the acts, of some of the apostles. The few ways that we have listed are just a starting point to open your mind to infinite possibilities.

DANGERS!

Obviously, there are dangers involved in opening our minds for spiritual guidance. Jesus warned:

"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24.)

Paul wrote that certain men were:

". . . false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works" (II Cor. 11:13-15.)

Peter agreed:

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift

destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of" (II Pet. 2:1-2.)

John wrote a similar warning:

"Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1.)

The guidance of God is not just important, it is essential. Every child of God is led by the Spirit of God. We must, therefore, seek for this guidance in spite of danger.

THE EXAMPLE OF SAUL

We have shown that Jesus guided His disciples while He was with them in the flesh. Now we have shown from the book of Acts that He continued to guide them by means of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this guidance was given in an understandable voice with specific instructions. For example, Jesus spoke to Saul of Tarsus in the Hebrew tongue (Acts 26:14.) Among other things, he commanded him:

"But rise, and stand upon thy feet; for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of the things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:16-18.)

Saul, as you know, would later be known as the Apostle Paul. His remarkable testimony is recorded three times in the book of Acts (Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-22; 26:9-23.) Studying all three accounts provides interesting insight into God's communication to man. One account mentions that everyone heard the voice of Jesus: **"And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man" (Acts 9:7.)** Another account points out that even though everyone heard Jesus speak in the Hebrew language, only Saul understood what He said; **"And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not (understood not) the voice of him that spake to me (Acts 22:9.)** The message which was clear to Paul, was not clear to anyone else.

Sometimes, even for believers, God's guidance is not so obvious. Each experience has to be weighted and evaluated on its own merits. It is a fact, however, that God did give guidance to His people.

THE EXAMPLE OF PETER

When Jesus first met Peter, he was known as "Simon, the son of John." Jesus saw such potential in Simon, that he changed his name to "Peter," which means "rock" (John 1:42.)

The way that Jesus guided Peter to preach to the gentiles is of particular encouragement.

- He commissioned him to do it (Matt. 28:18-20,) but Peter didn't understand.
- He inspired him to talk about it (Acts 2:39,) but Peter didn't understand.
- He waited for years for Peter to preach to the gentiles, but Peter didn't do it.
- He sent an angel to Cornelius, a gentile, with instructions to send for Peter (Acts 10:1-8.)
- He sent a vision to Peter at the time the messengers of Cornelius arrived, but Peter didn't understand it (Acts 10:13-15.)
- He repeated the same vision three times for Peter (Acts 10:16,) but Peter still didn't understand it.
- While Peter reflected on the vision, the Spirit spoke to him and commanded him to go with the men sent by Cornelius (Acts 10:19-20.)
- Peter finally claimed to understand that God was no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34.)
- Peter, however, continued to be a respecter of persons in his own Christian life and had to be rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11ff.)

God knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust. He was patient with Peter, and praise the Lord, we have every reason to believe that He will be patient with us.

CHAPTER VI

CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST

When Moses was about to die, he commanded that the book of the law be placed in the ark as a testimony against God's people. They had been rebellious while Moses was alive. He predicted they would be worse after he died. His predictions came true. Notice these words:

"And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished, that Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee. For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the Lord; and how much more after my death?" (Deut. 31:24-27)

Pessimistic predictions could accurately be made about these people, for their hearts were deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9.) This is not true, however, of Christians. We have been given a new heart! The Scriptures draw a distinction between the law of carnal commandments, and the power of an endless life (Heb. 7:19.) Fleshly covenants are created with an assumption of mistrust. If I do not trust you, I want something in writing. I assume that I am going to have to take you to court and make you do what is right. Consequently, I would want our agreement witnessed, and notarized. The "power of an endless life," however, makes possible a totally different kind of covenant.

Ezekiel predicted this new covenant centuries before Christ was born. He wrote of a time when God would give His people a new heart. The people of God would not need to be coerced by outward pressure, for He would place His Spirit within them and cause them to walk in His ways (Ez. 36:26-27.)

While Moses was correctly pessimistic about uncovered people, the apostles were always optimistic about those who are born again. The reason for this is obvious. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, and everything is new. We have every reason to be confident about such people. Paul's affirmation to the Philippians is representative of many similar passages: **"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6.)**

A SICKENING ILLUSTRATION

What we believe about God not only affects us, but also those around us. The following facts were taken from the April 9, 1990 NEWSWEEK magazine (p. 25.) John E. List, 64, was on trial in Elizabeth, N.J., for the 1971 murder of his wife, three children, and 84 year old mother. Before being captured, he had been in hiding for 18 years.

Here are some excerpts from a letter which he left behind to explain murdering his family:

"I know that what has been done is wrong from all that I have been taught and that any reasons that I may give will not make it right. But you . . . will at least possibly understand why I felt I had to do this.

1. I wasn't earning anywhere near enough to support us. Everything I tried seemed to fall to pieces. True we could have gone bankrupt & maybe gone on welfare.

2. But . . . knowing the type of location that one would have to live in plus the environment for the children plus the effect on them knowing they were on welfare was just more than I thought they could and should endure . . .

3. With Pat (daughter, 16) being so determined to get into acting I was also fearful as to what that might do to her continuing to be a Christian . . .

4. Also, with Helen (wife) not going to church I knew that this would harm the children eventually . . .

At least I'm certain that all have gone to heaven now. If things had gone on who knows if this would be the case . . . I'm sure many will say 'How could anyone do such a horrible thing' - my only answer is it isn't easy . . .

It may seem cowardly to have always shot from behind, but I didn't want any of them to know even at the last second that I had to do this . . .

I'm only concerned with making my peace with God & of this I am assured because of Christ dying even for me.

P.S. Mother is in the hallway in the attic - 3rd floor. She was too heavy to move."

The satanic insanity of this letter speaks for itself. It is a repulsive, and nauseating reminder of what can happen when we lose confidence in Christ.

NOT JUST FOR THE APOSTLES

It is quite common for people to be optimistic about the apostles, but not us. Many attempt to draw a distinction between what the Holy Spirit did then, and what He promises to do now. There is some validity in this line of reasoning. Christians today, for example, are not guided by the Holy Spirit to write Scriptures. Then they were. We must remember, however, that the Bible is filled with exceeding great and precious promises, and all these promises were not just for people in the First Century. Most of them are for us, and this certainly includes optimism about our future. Optimism is an integral part of Christianity.

Please consider again the letters of the apostles. They did not write to alien sinners who did not know the Lord. Their letters were addressed to believers. They wrote to people who had the Holy Spirit. They wrote to people with divine resources. Those who received such letters were described as "more than conquerers." Consider these words written by the inspired hand of John:

"I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. I have written unto you young men, because ye are strong, and the world of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one" (I John 2:12-14.)

Here are a few affirmations of optimism which the Apostles expressed in their writing:

● **"I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ. That in everything ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (I Cor. 1:4-9.)**

- **"Having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all" ((II Cor. 2:3.)**
- **"I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things" (II Cor. 7:16.)**
- **"Therefore we are always confident" (II Cor. 5:6.)**
- **"The great confidence which I have in you" (II Cor. 8:22.)**
- **"Have confidence in you through the Lord" (Gal. 5:10.)**
- **"In whom we have boldness and access with confidence" (Eph. 3:12.)**
- **"And we have confidence in the Lord that ye both do and will do the things which we command you" (II Thess. 3:4.)**
- **etc.**

The apostles did not have any confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3.) but they did have confidence in Christ. They also had confidence in those who had the Spirit of Christ. They believed that God would establish their hearts in unblameable holiness at the coming the the Lord Jesus (I Thess. 3:13.) They also believed that this blameless state would encompass, spirit, soul, and body (I Th ess. 5:23-24.)

CAST NOT AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE

The Hebrew letter was written to Jewish converts. Many of them were losing their confidence in Christ. Some were even returning to Judaism. They looked at the Jewish Temple as a symbol of permanence. Little did they realize that in a few short years not one stone would be left upon another that would not be cast down.

The great attractions of Christianity were invisible to the human eye. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen (Heb. 11:1.) God does not call us to a mountain that can be touched, or that turns black when scorched by fire. He calls us to:

"Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living god, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and

church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24.)

We are made partakers of Christ, only if we **"Hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Heb. 3:14.) "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward" (Heb. 10:35.)**

SOMETHING YOU MUST BELIEVE

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6.)

The verse presents two inescapable requisites of saving faith. First, we must believe that God is. This is the easy part. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork. Only a fool would say in his heart that there is not God.

Secondly, however, we must believe that God will reward us if we are diligent. Laboring for reward is an essential element of our Christian faith. Note again the Scripture. Those who come to God "must" believe that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

BRUCHKO

One of the most dramatic books I have personally read is BRUCHKO. It is the story of a nineteen year old boy named Bruce Olson. This shy and self effacing young man felt led of God to evangelize the Indians of South America. He had no training, background, or credentials as a missionary. He had virtually no money. He did not have the backing of any church, denomination, or missionary society. His amazing success is a remarkable tribute to the guidance of God. The unusual name of the book comes from the Indian's inability to pronounce the name of the missionary. When they tried to say "Bruce Olson," it sounded like "Bruchko."

Olson targeted the Motilone Indians. These stone age savages had no contact with the outside world, or with other tribes. They killed oil field workers so they could use their hard hats for cooking utensils, and their buttons for jewelry.

Olson's initial contact with the tribe was violent. They shot him in the thigh with a long arrow. Then they ripped the arrow from his leg, pulling some of his muscle out with it. After being held captive for a month, Bruce wrote: "God wanted me to leave, I felt sure." At this point, I remember having the distinct feeling that he was wrong. He had survived a month. I thought he was in a position to be accepted, and to learn their language. I thought it was a mistake for him to leave. I was wrong!

Several chapters later I discovered that an important Motilone leader named Arabadoyca, was on his way to kill Bruce Olson. The assassin believed the strange white man was a cannibal. He believed Olson would lead his people into a trap and eat them alive. If Bruce Olson had not followed the impulse to escape,

he would have been killed. Again I am reminded that each man will stand or fall to his own master. We need to be very careful about judging what God is leading others to do, or not to do.

At the time of this writing, some thirty years have gone by since Bruce Olson began his venture in faith. No one laughs at him today. When I read the book it had already been reprinted thirteen times in English, and published in eight countries outside the U.S. Olson speaks fifteen languages and has pioneered in the computer translation of tribal dialects. He has been personal friends of five presidents of Columbia, has spoken both the the United Nations and the Organization of American States. He is a recognized authority on Indian cultures and is one of the most famous missionaries in the world. Motilone converts to Christ are now graduating from the National School of Pedagogy as bilingual educators. Jungle warfare has been replaced by more than fifty health centers, forty-five bi-lingual schools, and forty-two agricultural centers.

OUT OF CONTROL

Ben Merold is a recognized expert on the subject of Church Growth. He states that: "All good growth will be out of control." Zounds! I thought. He's right!

Everyone knows that nothing is out of control to God. That's obvious! Ben evidently meant that all good church growth is out of man's control.

He further explained that in the course of teaching hundreds of students on the graduate level, he required many research projects. One such project involved studying church records. The students discovered that every six to nine years the average church experienced numerical growth. When the church tried to "control" this growth, however, it disappeared. It is not at all uncommon for some churches to stay the same size for decades. One reason for such lack of growth, involves control. Our efforts to control church growth is an indicator that we have more confidence in ourselves than we do in God.

Let's consider an example straight from the Bible. Suppose you are a part of a congregation of 120, and you had 3,000 converts in a single day. This, as you know, is precisely what happened to the church in Jerusalem. Can you not appreciate the level of discomfort this would bring to the average church board? Things would be out of their control. How would they protect their original little group from false teaching? Such a large influx of new believers would be seen as a grave danger to true doctrine. It would be the tail wagging the dog. In such a large congregation, people would be teaching without any man's approval or credentials. Even with twelve inspired apostles on the scene, such numbers are demonstrably unmanageable by man.

The problem of control was magnified, however, by the fact that these 3,000 new converts were evangelistic. Once again the fear of false teaching rears its ugly head. How can a conscientious board member tolerate anything so out of control? Soon their number was 5,000 men (Acts 4:4,) and probably not one had even received a Baptismal Certificate. Based on today's mentality, many board members would be forced to resign as a matter of conscience. Since things were out of their "control," they would automatically assume that apostasy was inevitable.

It has been estimated that the Jerusalem church had grown to over 20,000 before they saw the need of deacons. And then, of all things, they only appointed seven. We have congregations today with only a

hundred members that have this many deacons. These men in the Jerusalem Church, however, were not appointed to control, but to serve.

Then the problem of control by man was made even more difficult by persecution. Stephen was stoned and these thousands of uncontrolled believers were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. From the human standpoint, the situation was manifestly unmanageable. Fortunately, Jesus never lost control of anyone or anything. No matter where believers were, or what problems they faced, Jesus was in control. It is a great relief to remember that the Head of the Body is not separated from the members of His Body.

Perhaps the greatest church growth ever is taking place in modern times. The Iron Curtain is down, and an evangelistic fervor is sweeping Eastern Europe and Russia. Parts of Africa are aflame with evangelism. Only a few short years ago there were hardly any Christians in Korea. Now the biggest churches in the world are there. The evangelism of China is even more exciting. Some have estimated that there are more evangelical Christians in China than in any country on earth. Just as in the First Century, this amazing growth has been out of control. The wind blows where it wants to. We can hear the sound, but we cannot tell where it comes from, or where it is going. This, as you know, is precisely the illustration that Jesus used to describe those who are born of the Spirit.

It is exciting to consider that when you have confidence in Christ, you can experience as great an adventure as you can read about.

CHAPTER VII

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE EARLY EPISTLES

The book of Acts covers approximately thirty years of Christian history. This inspired record begins at the time Jesus ascended into heaven (about A.D. 30.) It ends at the time Paul had been a prisoner in Rome for two years (about A.D. 62.) We have already dealt briefly with the book of Acts, but now we will attempt to correlate the early Christian Letters with this narrative. It will be helpful to see what the apostles wrote, at the very time they were experiencing the leading of God in their own lives.

Time and space will not permit an exhaustive study. A few sample passages from each letter will have to suffice. Hopefully, they will provide sufficient evidence to show that God wants to guide all believers. This, to me, is not a periferal issue. It is a bed rock of Biblical truth. It is an integral part of Scripture. It involves the very essence of the Christian life. **"If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his (Rom. 8:9.) "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14.)** It is only with the help of Christ that we are "more than conquerors."

Perhaps we should pause at this point and reflect upon the remarkable fact that the word "disciple" is not found in the Christian Epistles. As we have said before, the Greek word for "disciple" is "mathetes." It comes from "manthano," which means "to learn." The Dictionary of New Testament Theology states that the noun "mathetes" is found 264 times in the N.T. Scriptures (exclusively in the Gospels and Acts.) I am not certain what implications should be drawn from this fact, but simply record this Biblical truth for your consideration.

JAMES

It is generally accepted that the book of James was written by the brother of Jesus. It may have been written quite early, perhaps about A.D. 45. There are several reasons for an early date. First, in James 2:2, the word "synagogue" is used to describe a Christian assembly. This indicates that Jewish Christians were still meeting in the synagogue. Second, the letter is addressed to the twelve tribes of the dispersion, that is, Jewish Christians. Later, as you know, Gentiles also became a part of the church. In the third place, there is no reference to the Jewish - Gentile controversy which came later. There may not have been any Gentile Christians at the time James wrote. At any rate, the book of James was, no doubt, written during that period of time covered in the book of Acts.

After the death of Stephen, there arose a great persecution against believers. This caused them to be scattered abroad (Acts 8:1.) James knew that these believers were not on their own. He knew that Jesus would never leave them or forsake them. Therefore, he taught them to seek supernatural help in the face of "manifold temptations."

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and ubraideth not; and it shall be given him. 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. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways" (Ja. 1:5-8.)

James knew that God would guide them, if they would only ask Him in faith. He believed that God had a plan for their lives, and cautioned them against making any plans without considering His divine will. He wrote that we ought to say:

"If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that" (Ja. 4:15.)

James was a leader in the Jerusalem Church. He was there when Annanias and Sapphira died for lying to God (Acts 5:1-10.) He witnessed many miracles. He was there when the lame man was healed at the Gate Beautiful. He was there when so many miracles were performed that people even wanted Peter's shadow to fall upon them (Acts 5:15.) He was there when an angel delivered the apostles from prison (Acts 5:19-20.) etc. Why wouldn't he be excited about the power of God? No wonder he wrote his brethren to seek wisdom and guidance from God.

THESSALONIANS

Paul wrote both letters to the Thessalonians about A.D. 51-52. Probably, they were his first inspired letters. In these letters, he reminded them: **"Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost (I Thess. 1:5.)** Paul considered them as examples to all that believed in Macedonia and Achaia. They were so excited, and evangelistic, that it was not necessary for Paul to say anything. He wrote: **"For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not so speak any thing" (I Thess. 1:8.)** Such success was not due merely to human effort, these early disciples were guided by the Holy Spirit. Paul thanked them for receiving his message as the **"word of God which effectually worketh in you that believe" (I Thess. 2:13.)**

At the very time Paul wrote these letters, he was experiencing the Word of God at work in his own life. He had recently been guided by God to take Timothy as a traveling companion (Acts 16:1-3, I Tim. 1:18.) He had been forbidden by the Spirit to preach in Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7.) He had been guided to Luke in Troaz, where he received a vision to go into Macedonia and preach (Acts 16:9-10.) He had been through an earthquake in Philippi and converted the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:23-34.) He had been driven out of Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:1ff.) When he came to Athens, he was deeply concerned about the Thessalonians, and sent Timothy to ascertain their spiritual condition. When Timothy returned with good news of their faith, Paul wrote First Thessalonians. A few months later, he wrote Second Thessalonians.

There are references in both letters to our Living God, working in the lives of believers. Paul expected them to experience the same victory he was experiencing. He went so far as to say that some aspects of the Christian life come directly from God, without the benefit of human teachers. Consider: **"But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (I Thess. 4:9.)** Love, as you know, is the very essence of God, and of the Christian life (I John 4:7-8.)

Jesus taught that anyone could love their friends, but His followers would have a much deeper and

stronger kind of love. They would love their enemies, and bless them that cursed them. They would do good to them that despitefully used them and persecuted them. This is the kind of love the Thessalonians had. They loved, in spite of the fact that they were experiencing persecution. **"For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judae are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews" (I Thess. 2:14.)**

Consider these inspired words:

"See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophecies. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:15-22.)

His second letter continues to promise the power of God in their daily living. **"Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him . . ."** (II Thess. 1:11.) He warned that some, who did not love the truth, would be given "strong delusion" so that they should believe a lie (2:11.) He asked for their prayers that the word of God would have "free course" in his life (3:1.) He expressed confidence that our Faithful God would establish them, keep them from evil, and cause them to obey his instructions (3:3-4) He believed that God would direct their hearts into the love of God and the patient waiting for Christ (3:5.)

Certainly Paul was encouraging the Thessalonians to experience much of the same guidance he was experiencing in his own life.

PAUL'S DOCTRINAL LETTERS

Paul wrote his great doctrinal letters about A.D. 57-58. They are I & II Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans. This part of Paul's life is covered by Acts 18: - 20:. Once again, Paul was involved in remarkable circumstances which reflected the guidance of God. Acts 19:10-11, for example, relates that while Paul was in Ephesus, all of Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus. This happened because God worked "special miracles" by the hands of Paul. At this very time the Holy Spirit was inspiring him to write his first letter to the Corinthians. Naturally, his writings at this time would reflect an emphasis on the power of God he was experiencing in his own life. Your study of the Christian Epistles will be enhanced when you realize there are promises in them for you. It may be exciting to find special promises in someone else's mail, but it is even more exciting to find such promises in your own mail. There are special promises in the Bible for YOU!

CORINTHIANS

As we said before, Paul was experiencing great success in Asia when he wrote I Corinthians. We

should not be surprised, therefore, to find references to the power of God in his writings at this time. Consider chapter one where he reminded them:

"But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Cor. 1:27-28.)

Paul did not focus on worldly wisdom and strength, because he wanted their faith to stand in the power of God. Please focus your spiritual insight and energy on these words:

"And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (I Cor. 2:3-5.)

In the same passage, he reminded his readers:

"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man" (I Cor.2:14-15.)

The letter is filled with promises and illustrations that have profound implications for the Christian. I Cor. 3: and 6: teach that we are temples of the Living God and that His Spirit dwells within us. God guided His people in the wilderness by a pillar of fire, and a pillar of a cloud which went before them. Now, the fire of God is within.

I Cor. 12: - 14: is a famous treatise on spiritual gifts, with an emphasis on love. While the theologians debate this passage, let us not lose sight of the fact that God is intimately involved with every Christian. This is the section which teaches that His Church is like a Body. It is obvious that the Head of the Body must have contact with, and control over, the members of His own Body.

II Cor. 3: describes the glories of the New Covenant by affirming that we are living letters. Once God wrote his laws in stone. Stones are cold, rigid, and lifeless. Now He writes His laws in the minds and hearts of believers. Paul recognized this and wrote:

"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath

made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit; for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life" (II Cor. 3:2-6.)

In II Cor. 3:18 Paul used the word "metamorphoo" to describe what happens to us as Christians. This word in English is "metamorphosis." This described what happens to the caterpillar when it becomes a butterfly. This is a beautiful illustration of what happens to believers as we are "transformed" or "changed" into the image of Christ.

ROMANS

A short while after writing First and Second Corinthians, Paul wrote to the Romans. While at Corinth, a sister named Phebe, just "happened" to be going to Rome. Undoubtedly the special miracles which God did in Asia were still on his mind when he wrote:

"For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ . . . But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; Whensoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you . . . but now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints . . ." (Rom. 15:18-25.)

Paul had planned to go to Rome for many years. Now, however, he was on his way to Jerusalem with an offering for the poor saints in Judea. He took the opportunity, nevertheless, to dictate the Roman Letter and send it with Phebe. It contained his personal greetings to more than twenty of his co-workers who were already there (Rom. 16:3ff.) Ultimately, Paul would make the journey to Rome as a prisoner. This too, he came to realize, was accomplished by the design of our Sovereign God.

We are attempting to understand what the Christian Letters teach about the guidance of God. We know that Jesus promised the apostles that He would not leave them as orphans. He would send the Holy Spirit to help them. The Christian Epistles help us to understand that the promise of the Holy Spirit is also for all believers. While there are many passages in Romans which deal with this, let us narrow our focus to only one chapter.

Romans 8: is indeed a beautiful treatise. Someone said, "If the Roman Letter were the Alps, chapter 8: would be the Matterhorn." It is again with some reluctance that we summarize a subject so sublime and profound. Even a single verse could provide sufficient scope for an entire book. Please bear with such brevity, and pause to ponder the wonderful way that the Holy Spirit operates in the life of every true believer. Romans 8: teaches that Christians are to:

- Walk in the Spirit (vs. 4)
- Mind the things of the Spirit (vs. 5)
- Be spiritually minded (vs. 6)
- Allow the Spirit to dwell in us (vss. 7-9)

- Allow Christ to dwell in us (vss. 10-13)

Then Paul presents an "either" "or" situation and wrote:

". . . Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. 8:9.)

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14)

You are either a child of God, or you are not. If you are a child of God you have the Holy Spirit. God, of course, does not give His Spirit to those who are not His children. The Holy Spirit does many things. One of the things which He does for the believer is to lead him. Therefore, as many as are led by the Spirit of God are His sons. Those who are not led by His Spirit are not His sons.

Notice also that the Spirit:

- Enables us to call God "Abba" (vs. 15)
- Bears witness with our spirit (vs. 16)
- Helps us to pray (vs. 26)
- Works all things together for good (vs. 28)
- Predestines us to be conformed to the image of Christ (vs. 29)
- Promises victory over any circumstances (vss. 35-39)

GALATIANS

While some would dispute this date, many scholars believe Paul wrote Galatians about A.D. 58. This is basically the same time he wrote his other Doctrinal Letters. He had just come through Galatia, and Phrygia in order, strengthening the disciples (Acts 19:23.) Apparently word came to him in Corinth that they had abandoned the truth for a perverted gospel. This occasioned the writing of Galatians. Several things distinguish this letter. First, it was not written to an individual, or to a single church. It was written to a group of churches. This is Paul's only letter specifically addressed to a group of churches. Second, Paul usually began his letters by saying something good about the church. Galatians, however, is without one word of commendation. Paul announces his credentials, and then berates them for accepting another gospel.

There is, however, still optimism for those who have the Holy Spirit. Notice Gal. 5:10: **"I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded."**

As a matter of fact, the emphasis of the letter is on the Holy Spirit. Some were abandoning the Spirit and returning to works of law. Those who did so were described as "severed from Christ and fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4.) Therefore, Paul urges them to "walk in the Spirit" and be "led of the Spirit" (5:16-18.)

Man cannot produce fruit, but the Holy Spirit can. God can produce fruit that is sweet from earth that is rotten. Paul taught the Galatians that the fruit of the Spirit was **"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance" (Gal. 5:22-23.)** Note that the Scriptures

describe these manifestations of the Spirit as "one." Paul did not say that the "FRUITS of the Spirit ARE." He said the "FRUIT of the Spirit IS." There is such harmony and unity in all that the Spirit does that His manifestations are described as one.

PAUL'S PRISON LETTERS

Several years passed before Paul wrote his prison letters. These letters are Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon. They were written from Rome in about A.D. 62-63. Once again, Paul wrote from an optimistic point of view. He believed that all things were working together for good.

Please do not lose sight of the fact that we are talking about the guidance of God. God can guide His people regardless of their education or intelligence. God wants to guide you, if you will let him. Please approach the study of Paul's prison letters from this perspective.

A series of events had just taken place in Paul's life which would have proved devastating, if it were not for the Holy Spirit. As you know, for several years he had toured the churches, receiving money for the poor saints in Judea. As he journeyed to Jerusalem with this money, the Holy Spirit testified in every city that bonds and imprisonment were waiting on him (Acts 20:23.) In Caesarea, the prophet Agabus, had confirmed this message (Acts 21:11.) Paul responded that he was not only ready to go to prison, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 21:13.)

The prediction about his imprisonment came true. Though Paul had done nothing wrong, wicked men lied about him and he was put in jail. The Lord, who will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able, came to Paul in prison and assured him: **"Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (Acts 23:11.)**

This trip, however, would not take place for several years. It would also involve circumstances which Paul never imagined. God, as you know, is always reliable, but never predictable.

While Paul was in prison, more than forty Jews took a vow that they would neither eat, nor drink, until they had killed him. By the providence of God, Paul was delivered from death and spent two years in prison at Caesarea. Felix, a corrupt governor, did not release Paul because he hoped to receive money from him. This cruel injustice was also done to please the Jews.

After two years, Felix was replaced by Porcius Festus (Acts 24:27.) It was during his reign that the providence of God brought Paul to Rome. It really didn't matter who was governor, God's sovereign will was going to be accomplished.

Someone has suggested that the child of God is indestructible until his life's work is completed. No man, or government of men, is capable of reversing the will of our Sovereign God.

Paul's thrilling journey to Rome is described in Acts 27: - 28: Please prayerfully consider the way that "all things were working together for good" in the life of this great apostle. And don't forget that all things can work together for good in our lives too.

PHILIPPIANS

Even though Philippians was written from prison, it is still a letter of joy and rejoicing. The noun for "joy" is found five times, and the verb eleven times. There is nothing negative in this letter. Remember all the "terrible" things that had recently happened to Paul. His suffering as a prisoner, his shipwreck, etc. were not seen by him as something bad. God was making something good out of every circumstance. Paul wrote:

"But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel . . . " (Phi. 1:13.)

There were problems in the Philippian Church, just as there are problems in every church. Euodias and Syntyche, for example, were having a disagreement (4:2.) Nevertheless, Paul was optimistic about their future, and the future of the whole church:

"Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (1:6.)

One reason for Paul's optimism was that God was "working" in the Philippians, both to "will and to do" (Phil. 2:13.) Both the desire to do something, and the ability to do it, were coming from God.

As if this were not enough, Paul also expected God to "reveal" that which was necessary to His people that they might be victorious. Consider:

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of Gold in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you . . ." (Phil. 3:13-15.)

COLOSSIANS

Paul had never been to Colossae (2:1.) He apparently learned of this church from Epaphras. Epaphras was from Colossae, but at the time this letter was written, he was with Paul in Rome. Paul knew the importance of supernatural help and prayed that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. He focused on the fact that Christians have a new nature. We are going through a metamorphosis from the works of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit. We are to putting to death our old way of living and putting on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Christ.

Once again Christ is pictured as the Head of His Body. **"And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18.)** It is, of course, obvious that the Head of the Body, would have some control over the members of the Body.

As a branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, the members of the Body cannot properly function apart from the Head of the Body. One of the unique ways that Christ directs the members of His Body is by giving, or taking away our peace. When we are doing His will we have peace, when we are not doing his will we do not have peace. Paul put it like this:

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

The Greek word translated as "rule" is "brabeuo." It means to "act as an umpire." When the child of God is doing something God does not want them to do, their "peace" is taken away. The divine "umpire," gives them chastening and direction.

A dear friend questioned this concept. He had been dealing with a cult which used subjectivism as a method of evangelism. They would encourage you to read their literature and allow yourself to be guided by "feelings." "If you will only read this," they said, "you will know it is from God." This brother was convinced from his knowledge of the Bible that their message was not from God.

I responded by reminding him of the reality of the new birth. The new birth is not just words on a page, it is a verifiable fact in the real world. If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation. Jesus said His sheep would hear His voice, but would not follow a stranger.

People who are not born again cannot be guided by the "peace" of Christ. Those who are not members of the Body, do not have a proper contact with the Head of the Body.

EPHESIANS

Ephesians is considered a "circular," or "encyclical" letter. While it was addressed to the saints at Ephesus, it was thought to have been circulated to all the churches of the area.

Ephesus, you will recall, was a center of pagan worship. The temple of the goddess Diana was located here. The preaching of the Gospel was so successful, however, that some idol makers feared they would go out of business. Believers burned their books of curious arts before all men. **"They counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19:20.)** The study of Ephesians should not be divorced from what these people were experiencing in their own lives, nor from God's providential guidance in the life of Paul.

It is with some reluctance that I have chosen to consider only three brief passages from Ephesians. Two of these passages involve a great promise, and the third contains an admonition.

First, notice Paul's prayer in chapter one (vss. 15-23.) He prayed that their eyes would be opened to the spiritual realities around them. Among other things, he wanted them to be aware of **"the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe."** Paul explained that this power was the very power that raised Christ from the dead and set Him at the right hand of God in the heavenlies. This power was not only available to Christ, or the Apostles. It is also God's power to "usward who believe." It is for all believers! Certainly we need to have our "eyes opened" to the reality of this power.

The second passage is from chapter three. Paul prayed that:

"He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ might dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Paul's next words bankrupt human vocabulary in a galant attempt to open our eyes to the awesome dimensions of God's mighty power.

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen" (Eph. 3:16-21.)

Please focus all of your mental and spiritual energies on this fantastic promise. God wants to give us:

- Not just all that we ask!
- Not just above all that we ask!
- Not just abundantly above all that we ask!
- Not just exceeding abundantly above all that we ask!
- But exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!
- According to the power that worketh in us.

LIKE A RIVER

Jesus said: **"He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.)" (John 7:38-39.)**

Everyone is familiar with a river. Rivers are a perennial source of power. One Greek word for "power" is "dunamis." This is the basis of our English word "dynamo." Rivers provide power for the great dynamos of commerce and industry. Rivers do not need encouragement, neither do they get tired. Man cannot make a river, or stop one from flowing. Rivers spring forth from the bowels of the earth and determine their own course and direction. No wonder Jesus said the Holy Spirit would flow like a river.

Hercules was perhaps the greatest hero of Greek mythology. His name and accomplishments are even legendary in the English language. When we seek to describe something which seems impossible, it is described as a "herculean" task. King Eurystheus of Tiryns gave Hercules twelve assignments which seemed impossible. One task, for example, involved a vast herd of cattle owned by King Augeas of Elis. Hercules was commissioned to remove all of their dung from the king's stables in a single day. The task seemed impossible. Hercules, however, overcame the insurmountable difficulty of his assignment by diverting the

waters of two rivers through the area that needed to be cleansed.

It is obvious that the massive filth of human society can never be cleansed by the efforts of mortal man. We need the power of the Holy Spirit flowing like a river.

LIKE AN ACROBAT

The third passage in Ephesians challenges the believer to walk "like an acrobat."

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:15-17.)

The Greek word translated as "circumspectly," is "akribos." This word in the English language is "acrobat." The first part of the word is "akros," which means "high." The second part is from "bainein," which means "to go." The King James Version translates the word as "diligently, perfectly, and circumspectly." Other versions render it "accurately" or "carefully."

An acrobat is someone who goes high. This is one reason why they have to be so careful. The point of the Scripture is that we must be like an acrobat. We must constantly be on guard against indifference and apathy. An acrobat is dealing with life and death. The Christian is dealing with eternal life and eternal death.

DON'T MAKE IT TOO HARD

The theme of this book involves the guidance of God. We have tried to show that Jesus selected very ordinary men to represent His message to the world. Their primary responsibility was to follow Him. When Jesus ascended to the Father, He did not abandon His disciples, or leave them like orphans, He continued to guide them by means of the Holy Spirit. The guidance of the Holy Spirit is not only evident in the book of Acts, but also in those early inspired letters which were written during that period of history covered by Acts. Obviously, this simple theme is also a part of all the Scriptures. It is hoped that this brief treatment of Scripture will help provide a perspective for your study of the whole Bible. Before concluding this chapter, let us briefly consider I, II, and III John.

Chronologically speaking, John was probably the last of the Apostles to write. He wrote five inspired books of the Bible: The Gospel of John, I, II, and III John, and Revelation. All of these books were probably written after A.D. 85.

At this time in John's life, we would expect him to teach "advanced theology." Advanced students usually have to learn big words and a special vocabulary. Exactly the reverse is true of John's writings.

Howard Marshall comments on this in his introductory remarks to John's Epistles (see page 2 of the NEW INTERNATIONAL COMMENTARY ON THE NEW TESTAMENT.)

"The student of the Greek New Testament is also well advised to begin his reading with these Epistles. Their Greek is the easiest to read in the whole of the New Testament. The total

vocabulary of the New Testament is 5,437 words; the number of different words used in 1 - 3 John is merely 303, and the majority of these are common words. To read a text with such a small vocabulary is a light undertaking. The general style and syntax of the Epistles is also simple and straightforward, and there are not many tricky passages to retard the beginner. Students who have not yet worked their way fully through an elementary Greek grammar can cut their teeth on these Epistles, and will have the rewarding experience of finding that they can actually read the New Testament itself without too much difficulty."

Following Jesus does require self denial and diligence, but we must never forget anyone who wants to can become a Christian. Even little children and retarded people can receive Jesus Christ as Lord. Even the uneducated savage can be saved. Once saved, every believer, regardless of education and intelligence, is guided by God.

In this chapter we have tried to show that the early Christian Letters spoke much about the guidance of God. We have selected these early letters because they were written at the same time the book of Acts was taking place. It is obvious that divine guidance was not just for the Apostles, but for all Christians. If you are a Christian, this guidance is for you! May God grant to each of us the courage to follow wherever He leads!

VIII

HIS ETERNAL PURPOSE

"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:10-11.)

God alone knows the future. Isaiah put it like this: **"I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done . . . " (Is. 46:9-10.)**

Before God created the universe, He knew exactly what He would do, and how He would do it. For this reason, Jesus was, in a sense, a "lamb, slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8.)

Please consider the obvious fact that:

GOD DOES NOT CHANGE!

"I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6.)

"God is not man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it; or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Nu. 23:19)

" . . . they shall be changed, but thou art the same and thy years shall not fail" (Heb. 1:12.)

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:6.)

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from teh Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (Ja. 1:17.)

AND GOD'S PLANS DO NOT CHANGE

Since God does not change, and since He knows everything, He has never had to change His plans. He conceived His plan before the foundation of the world, and He has never had to deviate from it.

In Rom. 16:25, this plan is said to have been kept secret since the world began. The same terminology is used in I Cor. 2:7 **"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory" (I Cor. 2:7.)** The same truth is taught in Eph. 3:9-11, Col. 1:26, II Tim. 1:9, Tit. 1:2, etc.

Peter reminded his readers that they were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold,

but by the precious blood of Jesus. He was like a **"lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you (I Pet. 2:18-20.)**

GOD TEACHES WITH TYPES AND SHADOWS

In the infancy of the world, man was not capable of understanding the majestic scope of God's redemption. It was therefore necessary for God to bring man to maturity. This was accomplished by the presentation of Gospel facts, and eternal truth, in "types" and "shadows."

Adam, for example, was a "figure," or "type," of Christ." This is stated explicitly in Romans 5:14. The Greek word translated as "figure," is "tupos." It comes from a word which means to "strike." The ancients used this word to describe a seal, stamp, or die, which made an impression when it was struck. The word is also translated as "pattern." When the official seal was struck, it left a pattern, or impression. The impression was not the real thing, but it was a pattern of the real thing. Adam was not Christ, but he was a "type," "figure," or "pattern," of Christ.

So also the Law was not substance, it was a shadow. This too is stated explicitly in Scripture: **"For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect" (Heb. 10:"1.)**

Throughout all of recorded history, God gradually revealed His eternal purpose. In sundry times and in divers manners, He spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets (Heb. 1:1.)

Henry Halley, in his Bible Handbook, offers this overview of divine revelation that helps us to focus on an eternal strategy, or purpose. (p. 660)

The first words in Genesis:

"In the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth." Gen. 1:1

Almost the last words in Revelation:

"I saw a new Heaven and a New Earth." Rev. 21:1

"The gathering together of the waters He called the Sea." Gen. 1:10

"And the Sea is no more." Rev. 21:1

"The darkness He called night." Gen. 1:5

"There shall be no night there." Rev. 21:25

"In the day you eat thereof you shall surely die." Gen. 2:17

"Death shall be no more." Rev. 21:4

"Cursed is the ground for your sake." Gen. 3:17

"There shall be no more curse." Rev. 22:3

Satan appears as deceiver of mankind. Gen. 3:1,4
Satan disappears forever. Rev. 20:10

They were driven from the Tree of Life. Gen. 3:22-24
The Tree of Life re-appears. Rev. 22:2

They were driven from God's presence. Gen. 3:24
"They shall see His face." Rev. 22:4

Man's primeval home was in a garden by a river. Gen. 2:10
Redeemed man's eternal home will be beside a river. Rev. 22:1

God did not create man, and then abandon him. From the beginning of time, until the end of time, God has been orchestrating every event so that it will be in harmony with His eternal purpose.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE HEBREW PEOPLE

Consider also the example of the Hebrew people. The things which happened to them were ordained by God to teach us. God called Abram out of Ur of Chaldea, and directed him to Palestine. He then "promised" this land to Abram, and to his seed. Genesis 15:13ff. records the promise of God in remarkable detail. Abram was told that his seed would dwell in a strange land for four hundred years. God promised to judge the nation that oppressed them, and assured Abram that his posterity would come out of that land with great substance. In the fourth generation they would return to the Promised Land. Similar promises were made to Isaac, and Jacob. God was not about to abandon these people. They were an integral part of His eternal plan.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that the Hebrew people were, at least in some respects, "our examples." After describing Israel's evil conduct in the wilderness, Paul wrote:

"NOW THESE THINGS WERE OUR EXAMPLES, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. NOW ALL THESE THINGS HAPPENED UNTO THEM FOR EXAMPLES: AND THEY ARE WRITTEN FOR OUR ADMONITION, UPON WHOM THE ENDS OF THE WORLD ARE COME" (I Cor. 10:6-11.)

Some remarkable analogies can easily be made. They were enslaved in Egypt, as we were enslaved by sin. They were delivered by Moses, as we were delivered by Christ. They were all "baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea," and we arose from baptism to walk in newness of life. They were strangers and pilgrims, and we are strangers and pilgrims. God provided for them in their wilderness, and God also provides

for us in our wilderness.

The guidance of God for the Hebrew people was less than subtle. God sent an angel before them to keep them in the right way and to bring them into the Promised Land (Ex. 23:20, 23.)

Throughout all their journeys the Lord directed them by means of a pillar of a cloud in the day, and a pillar of fire at night (Ex. 40:34-38.) This statement is given in greater detail in Numbers 9:15-23. Consider:

"At the commandment of the Lord the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the Lord they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord, and journeyed not . . . And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed . . . " (Numbers 9:18-21.)

God directed His people to go places where human wisdom would never have taken them. If Moses had "planned" the journey, it would never have taken place. The decision to go by way of the Red Sea, for example, seemed like suicide. From the human point of view they were trapped. God, however, was guiding them. He knew exactly what He was going to do before the journey even started. God knew things which neither Moses, or Pharaoh even dreamed about. God parted the Red Sea and the Hebrews marched over on dry ground. When Pharaoh and his army tried to do it, they were drowned. Moses got so excited about the guidance of God that he composed a song:

"I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his ride hath he thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him" (Ex. 15:1-2.)

It is both interesting and significant to remember that the book of Revelation pictures the redeemed of earth singing the song of Moses:

"And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest" (Rev. 15:3-4.)

In the vast wilderness the Hebrew people had neither food nor water. Once again they were utterly dependent upon God for survival. When the people were thirsty, God gave them water. If no water was available by natural means, He gave them water in miraculous ways. Exodus 15:23ff. for example, tells about God helping the Hebrews to turn bitter waters sweet. In Exodus 17:6 God commanded Moses to smite a rock so that it would bring forth waters for the people.

God also provided bread for His people by giving them manna from heaven. This miraculous food was to be gathered every day. If they tried to hoard more than they needed for a single day, it bred worms and stank (Ex. 16:20.) God's miraculous provision was such that everyone had just the right amount. Those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no lack (Ex. 16:18.) Paul referred to this in II Cor. 8:15 and made an application of that truth to the people of his generation. God's provision for His people was so complete that even their clothing and shoes did not wear out for forty years. This is stated explicitly in Nu. 29:5:

"I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot."

CHRISTIANS ARE NOW THE ISRAEL OF GOD

It is preposterous, ludicrous, and unthinkable, that God would guide and provide for the Jewish nation, but not us!

- We are the "Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16.)
- We are the "true Jews" (Rom. 2:28-29.)
- "We are the circumcision which worship God in spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh (Phil. 3:3.)
- It is through us that the principalities and powers in heavenly places will see the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10)
- We are a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (I Pet. 2:9.)

We, as Christians, are going to be judged regarding the "will" of our Father, which is in heaven. Jesus said: **"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21.)** The same truth is repeated in Matt. 12:50: **"For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he same is my brother, and sister, and mother."** And also in Mark 3:55: **"For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother."**

The "will" of God is not defined in these passages. Certain it is the will of God that we follow His moral laws and abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. But certainly the "will" of God in our lives encompasses much more than this. Jesus told the story of a certain man with two sons. The father asked both sons to work in his vinyard. This was not a "moral" issue in the traditional sense of the word, yet Jesus honored that son which did the will of his father. Jesus told a similar story which is found in Luke 12:35-48. It was also about a servant who knew his Lord's will and didn't do it. The servant of the Lord is committed to do the Lord's will, regardless of what that entails.

A LOVE SLAVE

Hebrew Law made provision for slavery. There was, at least, some limited protection for these slaves under that law. Ex. 21:2, for example, guaranteed the slave freedom after six years of service. Ex. 21:26-27 provided protection against cruelty.

The same chapter, however, describes a type of slavery which had no protection. If a man loved his master, he could refuse to go free on the seventh year. He could say: **"I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free" (Ex. 21:5.)** In this case, the slave was taken to the judges and his ear was pierced with an aul. This public ceremony indicated that this man would be a slave FOREVER!

Slavery was quite common in the Apostolic Age. In Italy, for example, up to 75% of the people were slaves. In 50 B.C., statisticians estimate that there were 21,000,000 slaves, and only 7,000,000 citizens. It is not by accident that Paul wrote to the Christian in Rome and described himself as the "slave" of Jesus Christ (Rom. 1:1.) The Greek word is "doulos," which is translated as "servant" in the King James Version. It is, however, their word for slave. Paul was not the only "slave" to Jesus Christ. Every Christian is to be a "love slave" as well. Consider these words in Romans 6:16-18. I have taken the liberty of translating the word "doulos" as slave:

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves *slaves* to obey, his *slaves* ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the *slaves* of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the *slaves* of righteousness."

2,000 CUBITS

When the Hebrew people were about to cross the Jordan, the officers of God commanded them to stay about 2,000 cubits from the Ark of the Covenant.

"And they commanded the people, saying, When ye see the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, and the priests the Levites bearing it, then ye shall remove from your place, and go after it. Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore" (Josh. 3:3-4)

It is estimated that there were over two million Israelites. This estimation is based on the fact that there were 603,550 fighting men (Nu. 2:32.) These fighting men did not include the young, the old, or the Tribe of Levi. Neither did this census count women. Obviously there was a very large group of people following the ark. So many people may have become confused if they tried to follow too closely. Therefore, they were commanded to leave a space of two thousand cubits between them and the ark. This was over a half mile. This distance would give them enough room to gain perspective. The guidance of God is imminently practical. He is able to see things through our own perspective.

Once again, it is important to remember that today, God guides us from within. God has written His New Covenant in our minds, and in our hearts. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, and our hearts are the ark of His covenant.

THE WORLD'S GREATEST DISCOVERY

Columbus discovered America. Magellan discovered the Pacific Ocean. Newton discovered gravity. Madam Curie discovered radium. Someone discovered gold in California, and someone else discovered diamonds in South Africa. None of these discoverers created anything. They only found something that was already there. These "discoveries," however, are still very important. Until something is discovered, it cannot be correctly utilized for the benefit of man.

Take, for example, Newton's discovery of gravity. Apples had been falling from trees since Eden, but the principle had not really been "discovered." Newton's discovery has revolutionized the world. We use the principles he discovered to plot the trajectories of our space ships. His "discovery" has opened the door and paved the way to new horizons.

The world's greatest discovery, however, is a personal one. God has always been there, but not everyone has discovered Him. Many casually acknowledge His existence without understanding the implications of such a confession. The God who created the universe, is also a very personal God. He knows our name, and numbers the very hairs of our head. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge. When you "discover" Him, your life will never be the same.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

In the age of Moses, only the High Priest could come into the presence of God. This could happen only one day of the year, and only under very rigid circumstances and regulations. In that day, God promised to meet with His people between the outstretched wings of the cherubim, in the Holy of Holies. On the Day of Atonement, the High Priest was permitted to have this experience if he was properly clothed and sanctified.

Today, however, every believer is invited to partake of a personal experience with God:

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh" (Heb. 10:19-20.)

Christianity must be personal. No one can be saved by proxy, or experience God for someone else. Personal experience is the vehicle God uses to become real in the life of believers.

Take Simon Peter, for example. He had been with Jesus for many months. He had heard many lessons from Jesus, and witnessed many miracles. Something happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, however, that finally broke through the veneer of his life and penetrated to the very core of his being. He wrote about that experience many years later:

"For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory. This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we hear, when we were with him in the holy mount" (II Pet. 1:16-18.)

In the next verses, Peter writes that this kind of experience makes the prophetic word more sure. That which we know "intellectually," is reinforced by that which we experience. He told us to take heed unto the prophetic word, as unto a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the day star arises in our own hearts. Peter's personal experience caused the reality of Christ to "dawn" upon him. Our personal experience can do the same for us.

An unknown author has penned these poignant words about discipleship:

"I am a part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I have Holy Spirit power. The die has been cast. I have stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I am a disciple of His. I won't look back, let up, slow down, or back away. My past is redeemed. My present makes sense. My future is secure. I am finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap giving, and dwarfed goals. I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don't have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, rewarded, or regarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, live by prayer, and labor by power. My face is set, my gate is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way is rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, compromised, detoured, lured away, turned back, deluded or delayed. I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, ponder at the pool of popularity or meander in the maze of mediocrity. I won't give up, let up, shut up - until I've stayed up, stored up, prayed up, paid up, and preached up for the cause of Christ. I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go until He comes, give until I drop, preach until all know, and work until He stops me. And when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing me. My banner will be clear."

CHAPTER IX

LEARNING FROM THE LOWER CREATURES

The book of Job is very old. Some feel it was written before the Age of Moses. Prayerfully consider these wise words spoken by this inspired man of God.

"But ask now of the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:7-10.)

There are some lessons we can learn from the lower creatures. They were created by God (Gen. 1:24.) They were designed to bring praise and glory to God (Ps. 148:7, 10.) They are not immortal (Ps. 49:12-15.) They were given to man for food (Gen. 9:3.) Man was to have dominion over them (Gen. 1:26-28.) The heathen worshipped them (Rom. 1:23.) As Job said, however, there are some lessons we can learn from these lower creatures. Since this is a book about the guidance of God, we will narrow our focus to deal with only this aspect of the way God created insects, animals, birds, and fish.

In particular we will note that these lower creatures are guided from within, by the very nature of their creation.

GO TO THE ANT

Many years ago I committed to memory these words of wise King Solomon about the ant. He said: **"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise" (Prov. 6:6)** Since Solomon was speaking to "sluggards," I applied his words to those who were "slothful," and "lazy." This is, no doubt, an appropriate use of the text. Ants are not lazy. Ants work hard. Their industry enables them to prepare for the winter. Lazy people need to be like the ant. They need to work hard so that they will have something to eat too. The Scriptures teach that if a man does not work, neither should he eat (II Thess. 3:10.)

There is, however, much more to an ant colony than hard work. Please consider the next verses also:

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (Prov. 6:6-8.)

Ants are among the most numerous creatures on earth. The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary states that there are over 10,000 different species of ants. If you want to find some, just have a picnic. Their number is estimated to be ten million billion. The ant population far exceeds all mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians combined.

Experts agree that the ant's major advantage is to be found in its social organization. The ant colony has been described as a factory within a fortress. They are among the most organized creatures on earth.

Ants have soldiers, builders, nurses, workers, and other specialists which combine their lives in single minded dedication to the protection of their colony and their queen.

Notice that this remarkable social organization is accomplished without a "guide, overseer, or ruler." Three different Hebrew words are used to describe their utter and absolute absence of a leader. As winter approaches, it is not necessary to hire someone to be a leader for the ants. It is not necessary for some well meaning individual to get the ants lined up, and organized for work. An ant hill is already organized. Ants are organized because God created them to be that way.

Consider, for example, the life of the leaf cutter ant. Forty different species of this particular ant are found from Louisiana to Argentina. They are said to be the most accomplished farmers and gardeners of the animal world. A single colony of leaf cutters has different sized ants. The large ants use their size and strength to cut fragments of leaves and flowers and carry them back to the nest. Smaller ants chop these fragments into pieces. Still smaller ants reduce the fragments to pulp. This pulp is then cultivated into a fungus. The fungus breaks down the poisons in the leaves and makes them edible. These ants survive by creating an assembly line. Each size of ant performs a unique, and necessary function. Remember, that all of this amazing organization is accomplished without a "guide, overseer, or ruler."

Surely, Christian people can learn something from from the ant! We can also learn a great deal from other creatures as well. God is not the Author of confusion. Consider geese in formation, bees in a colony, cattle in herds, and quail in a covey. There are literally thousands of creatures that can teach us much about God. These creatures are, what they are, by virtue of creation. So are Christians!

MIGRATION

We have shown how God guided the Hebrew people, and insisted that He can also guide us. Perhaps it will be helpful to give examples of the marvelous way God guides creatures that are much inferior to man. The Pacific Golden Plover, for example, flies each year from Alaska to Hawaii. This journey of thousands of miles is accomplished without taking classes in navigation, and without the benefit of a man made map. Some months later, the Golden Plover completes the return trip in the same miraculous way. The Artic Tern is even more amazing. It spends the summer above the Artic Circle, and the winter in the Anartic. This marathon journey involves a round trip flight of over 22,000 miles. Or consider the remarkable swallows, who return to Capistrano on the same day every year. How do they do it? Only God knows!

In 1957, a group of scientists took eighteen Laysan Albatrosses from their nests on Midway Island in the Pacific. Amelia Earhart got lost in this part of the world and has never been heard from again. These birds, however, didn't get lost! They were flown to six different locations at various places around the globe. Some were taken over 4,000 miles from their home. Within thirty-two days, fourteen had somehow made their way back to Midway Island. It is assumed that the other four were killed by predators, or died en route. How did they do it? Only God knows!

Homing Pigeons are famous for their unerring guidance system. They have been placed in pitch dark boxes and taken over one hundred miles from home. Within ten to twenty seconds of their release, however, they were on course for their return trip. How do they do it? Only God knows!

It seems that creatures of the deep, have an even more remarkable guidance system than do birds. Consider, for example, those eels which are hatched between Bermuda, and the West Indies. At maturity, they swim over 3,000 miles to the rivers of Europe. This is where they will spend the entirety of their adult lives. When their life cycle is about over, some five to twenty years later, they will return to the place of their birth, spawn, and die. How do they do it? Only God know. Steelhead Trout do much the same. They too have an uncanny guidance system which was given them by God. They are born in fresh water, spend their lives in salt water, and somehow know exactly how to get back to their fresh water home when it is time to spawn and die. It is indeed a remarkable sight to see them swimming upstream, and even leaping water falls to fulfill their destiny. How do they do it? Only God knows!

Job wanted us to learn something from the lower creatures. Surely we can! If God can guide them, obviously He can guide us too.

METAMORPHOSIS

The word "metamorphosis," literally means to be changed into another form. It is found four times in the Bible. Two times it refers to Jesus, who was changed into another form on the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matt. 17:2, and Mark 9:2.) The other two times it refers to Christians, who are changed into another form by the power of God (See Rom. 12:2, and II Cor. 3:18.)

The Monarch butterfly is a good example of "metamorphosis." It begins its life as a small egg on a milkweed plant. Typically, it will be incubated along the Gulf of Mexico, or in some other warm climate. The creature which is hatched, however, does not look like a butterfly. It is an ugly caterpillar with a voracious appetite. The caterpillar, however, goes through a metamorphosis. It is changed into another form. These two creatures are dramatically different. They are different in appearance, nature, and function. The caterpillar, of course, cannot fly. It will spend the cycle of its short life only a few feet from where it began. The butterfly, by contrast, not only has the ability to fly, it can migrate thousands of miles. In the process of the metamorphosis, God gives the butterfly a new mind. Its nature is changed. In a single season, several generations of butterflies will travel further, and further North, until they arrive in Canada. Before winter, however, they will return South to the place where their ancestors came into existence. How do they do it? Only God knows!

CONVERSION AND TRANSFORMATION

Since the concept of "metamorphosis" is so evident in the animal world, God uses it to teach us about Christianity, and conversion. As we have said before, the word is only found four times in the Bible. Two times it was applied to Jesus, and two times to us. Let us consider those passages which talk about our metamorphosis.

The first is Romans 12:1-2:

"I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that

good and acceptable, and perfect will of God."

"Conformation" comes from outward pressure, but "transformation" comes from within. A caterpillar does not become a butterfly by being compressed in a mold. Attempting to do so would prove fatal to the caterpillar. Neither do we become Christians by external pressure. Not even the Law of Moses could do this. This is why there had to be a change of law. We must be "born again." We must have the Law of God written on our minds and in our hearts.

Now let us consider the second passage. At this point it is important to point out that in the Christian life, "conversion" happens immediately, but "transformation" is a lifetime process. This "process" is beautifully described by Paul in II Corinthians. We have already mentioned this passage in chapter two, but it bears repetition.

"But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are CHANGED into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18.)

The word "changed," in this passage, is the word "metamorphosis." The caterpillar does not become a butterfly immediately. This happens over a period of time.

Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the famous story of "The Great Stone Face." It seems to be a commentary on the words of Paul. Here is a brief condensation of that story.

High in the White Hills of New Hampshire, a Great Stone face was formed by nature on the perpendicular side of a mountain. It seemed as if an enormous giant, or a Titan, had sculptured his own likeness on the precipice. There was the broad arch of the forehead, and hundred feet in height; the nose with its long bridge; and the vast lips which, if they could have spoken, would have rolled their thunder accents from one end of the quaint valley to the other. True it is, that if the spectator approached too near, he lost the outline of the gigantic visage and could only discern a heap of ponderous and gigantic rocks piled in chaotic ruin one upon another. Retracing his steps, however, the wondrous features would again be seen; and the farther he withdrew from them the more like a human face, with all its original divinity intact, did they appear until, as it grew dim in the distance, with the clouds and glorified vapor of the mountains clustering about it, the Great Stone Face seemed positively to be alive.

Beneath the shadow of the mountain lived a small boy named Ernest. As a toddling child he listened to his mother relate the strange prophecy passed down from generation to generation by the inhabitants of the valley. They believed that some kind and benevolent person would someday appear who bore the exact likeness of the visage which nature had formed on the mountainside. Little Ernest would clap his hands in childish delight at the thought that someday he might live to see the man of the Great Stone Face.

The days and the years rolled by. Ernest never forgot the message of hope in those prophetic stories. Each day he would stand at sunset and meditate and pray as he gazed into the Great Stone Face.

Soon it was noised abroad that one of the inhabitants of that very valley had marched out into the world to seek his fortune. He was not the world's most wealthy individual. Ships

and caravans and countless servants brought him wealth from every part of the then known world. Now it was told that this very man was returning to the valley of his birth. A majestic mansion was being prepared as his residence. Those who knew him as a boy insisted that he looked just like the kind and benevolent face that smiled down from the mountainside. The valley tingled with excitement at the prospects of seeing at last the realization of their dreams. When the man at last appeared, the hopes of the valley were only short lived. There was a resemblance sure enough, but it was only a shallow and a superficial one. Ernest had been watching the Great Stone Face every day of his life, and immediately he discerned that the Great Stone Face was not this man of wealth. Soon the people too came to realize that the object of their prophetic hope was yet to come.

When the man of wealth was dead, another rumor spread through every home through the countryside. This time the hope of the valley was the illustrious commander of a great army. HE too had been born in the valley. He had gone out to seek his fortune, and he was now returning tthe decorated and battle scarred veteran of many foreign wars. His school mates and friends all testified that he resembled the Great Stone Face to a hair. Thousands lined the road as his carriage drew near. Tables were arranged at a clearing in the woods so that the celebrated guest could be welcomed with speeches and toasts. Once again Ernest was there standing on tiptoe . . . once again he was disappointed. Again the people had been misled by only a shallow and superficial resemblance to the face on the mountainside. The Great Stone Face was neither the man of wealth, nor the man of war.

The years rolled swiftly by. Others came and went, exciting momentarily the hopes of the villagers. Politicians, poets, and others passed their way, but still the prophecies were yet to be fulfilled.

Ernest was advancing in years. His hair was gray. His dedicated and humble life was highly revered all throughout the valley. He was recognized as a paragon of wisdom and humility. The people came to gather with him at sunset for his time of prayer. They would ask him questions and share the beauty of his life. The withering hand of time gave certain frustrations now to Ernest. The man of the Great Stone Face would have to appear soon or death would rob him of the all-consuming passion of his life.

The hour of sunset came. Ernest made his way out into the woods as his custom was. The people followed to a small nook among the hills with a gray pricipice behind. The stern front was relieved by the pleasant foliage of many creeping plants that made a tapestry for the naked rock. At a small elevation above the ground, set in a rich framework of verdure, there appeared a nitch spacious enough to admit a human figure with freedom for such gestures as spontaneously accompany earnest thought and genuine emotion.

Ernest ascended to this natural pulpit and began to speak. The countenance of this venerable man radiated love. All of his life had been devoted to others and to meditations about the Great Stone Face. The glory of his white hair was diffused about his face. At a distance, but distinctly to be seen, high up in the golden light of the setting sun, appeared the Great Stone Face with hoary mists around it like the white hairs around the brow of Ernest. Its look of grand beneficence seemed to embrace the world.

At this very moment, in sympathy with a thought which he was about to utter, the face of Ernest assumed a grandeur of expression so imbued with benevolence that one of the people, by an irrestable impulse, threw up his arms and shouted, *'Behold! Ernest is himself the likeness of the Great Stone Face!'*

Now, let us consider again the inspired words of II Cor. 3:18. This time we shall record them as they are translated by Phillips:

"But all of us who are Christians have no veils on our faces, but reflect like mirrors the glory of the Lord. We are transfigured in ever-increasing splendor into his own image, and the transformation comes from the Lord who is the Spirit."

OLD SHEP

There are an infinite number of lessons we can learn from the lower creatures. Permit me to recount a final lesson in loyalty from a dog named Shep.

Shep lived in Montana. His shepherd master died in 1936, and his body was shipped by rail from Fort Benton, Montana. Old Shep watched the train disappear, and never left the station. Each day the dog met every train, and scrutinized every passenger. He was, of course, waiting for the return of his master.

At first, the vigil went unnoticed. But in 1939, Ed Shields put the story in print and the dog became famous. Newspapers lauded his faithfulness, and Robert Ripley wrote about him in "Believe It Or Not." A special secretary was assigned to take care of the avalanche of mail. As much as \$100,000 was donated for the "Shep Fund," and has subsequently been used for charity.

Old Shep met his final train on January 12, 1942. His vigil lasted five and one-half years. He was buried on the bluff overlooking the depot, and a profile monument was erected in his honor. Old Shep teaches us a lesson in loyalty that should not be forgotten.

George Graham Vest wrote this beautiful Eulogy on the Dog:

"The one absolutely unselfish friend that man can have in this selfish world, the one that never deserts him, the one that never proves ungrateful or treacherous, is his dog.

A man's dog stands by him in prosperity and in poverty, in health and in sickness. He will sleep on the cold ground, where the wintry winds blow and snow drives fiercely, if only he may be near his master's side. He will kiss the hand that has no food to offer, he will lick the wounds and sores that come in encounter with the roughness of the world. He guards the sleep of his pauper master as if he were a prince. When all other friends desert, he remains. When riches take wings and reputation falls to pieces, he is as constant in his love as the sun is in its journey through the heavens. If fortune drives the master forth an outcast in the world, friendless and homeless, the faithful dog asks no higher privilege than that of accompanying him to guard against danger, to fight against his enemies; and when the last scene of all comes and death takes the master in its embrace and his body is laid away in the cold ground, no matter if all other friends pursue their way, there by his graveside, will the noble dog be found, his head between his paws, his eyes said but open in alert watchfulness, faithful and true even to death."

It is worthy of note that Strong's Exhaustive Concordance defines "proskuneo," the Greek word for

"worship," as "to kiss, like a dog licking his master's hand."

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:22-25.)

CHAPTER X

GUIDANCE FROM THE FAMILY

The family is of divine origin. God made one man, for one woman, for one life. He placed them together in the Garden of Eden, and announced that for this cause a man would leave his father and mother, and cleave unto his wife, and they two would become one flesh.

The Gospel was first preached to this little family in the Garden of Eden. After Adam and Even had sinned, God announced that the seed of woman would crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15.) This prophecy, of course, was about Jesus. He was to be born of their family, and would ultimately destroy the devil. Genealogical records of the family of Jesus form an integral part of the Bible. The New Testament Scriptures begin with His ancestral records. These family ties were not just important, they were essential. Matthew, chapter 1, lists forty-two ancestors of Jesus. They are arranged in three groups of fourteen so that they could more easily be memorized.

Family ties are important to God. The mother of Jesus was a cousin of Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. Jesus was therefore baptized by a member of His family.

The disciples of Jesus were identified by relationships with their families. Peter and Andrew were brothers. James and John, were also brothers and their father's name was Zebedee. Judas was the brother of James. The other James was the son of Alphaeus. Some scholars think that some of the disciples were cousins of Jesus, and that the wedding in Cana of Galilee was for his sister.

When Paul wrote to the Romans he sent greetings to his kinsmen, Andronicus, and Junia. They were of note among the apostles and were also in Christ before he was (Rom. 16:7.) He also sent greetings from Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater who were also his kinsmen (Rom. 16:24.) When Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem, he was saved from death by his sister's son. Mark, his traveling companion, was also "sister's son to Barnabas." Families are a time honored and treasured vehicle through which the guidance of God is given to man.

Evangelism spread naturally through families. Note the many Christian families which are mentioned in the Bible. We read of the household of: Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippian Jailer, Aristobulus, Narcissus, Stephanus, and Onesiphorus. Converts were even made in Caesar's household, and Christians in general are designated as the "household of faith."

You should not be surprised, therefore, that God may try to give guidance to you by means of your family.

COMMON SENSE

As we seek for guidance from God, there is always a place for common sense. This truth is also applicable to the family. When Paul wrote about family relationships to Timothy, he pointed out that Adam was not deceived, but Eve, being deceived was in the transgression (1 Tim. 2:13-14.) There is a logical reason why Adam was not easily deceived. Read Genesis 2:15-20, and note the things which Adam did (with God,) before

Eve was created.

- He dressed and kept the garden
- He was offered every tree of the garden for food
- He was warned about the tree of the knowledge of good and evil
- He named all the cattle
- He named all the fowls
- He named every beast of the field
- Adam, and God, concluded that there was yet not creature suitable for him
- Only then did God cause a deep sleep to come upon Adam, take a rib from his side, and form Eve.

Adam's time alone with God must have been quite long. I recently witnessed a presentation on pruning peach trees that lasted over two hours. This lesson was only a tiny fraction of a college course on caring for peach tree. Imagine how long it must have taken Adam to learn how to properly care for all the plants and trees in the garden. It may have taken years. So also the naming of God's creatures must have required a lot of time. It is hard to believe that Adam was nonchalant about this honor, and responsibility. God brought to him all of the cattle, every bird, and every beast. As God brought these creatures to Adam, there may have been many questions, and much discussion. The point is, Adam had all of these learning experiences before Eve was even created. Again we emphasize that Adam was first formed and then Eve, and that Adam was not deceived. Common sense should have compelled Eve to value and obey the counsel of her husband, but she did not.

We must make a place for common sense as we try to understand and follow the guidance of God. There is an old story about the farmer who read Mark 11:24 and came to believe that he could fly like the birds. This verse promises: **"What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."** Since the man believed that he could fly, he promptly got a ladder and climbed to the highest pinnacle of a high barn. This bold experiment, he vowed, would put the words of Jesus to the acid test. Just before he leaped, however, God gave him wisdom. It dawned on him, that when a bird wants to fly, it doesn't have to get a ladder and climb to the top of a barn. A bird can start flying from the ground. There is nothing necessarily unspiritual about common sense.

As we have pointed out before, there have been many instances when God commanded his people to do things which seemed illogical. He gave such commands to Moses, Gideon, and many others. Each time God gave such commands, however, these unusual requests were authenticated by signs. The story of Gideon is so well known that it has become proverbial. God commanded him to fight the Midianites. Initially, it seemed illogical. Then, as you know, God gave him a variety of indisputable signs. Finally, common sense compelled him to do that which seemed contrary to common sense. If God guides you to do something contrary to logic and reason, He will undoubtedly accompany such a request with signs.

CHILDREN ARE TO OBEY PARENTS

This same principle of common sense also applies to children. The most brilliant child lacks experience in many important areas of life. Adam and Eve learned things by experience that their children needed to know. It is a matter of common sense, as well as Biblical command, for children to obey their parents.

In the Age of the Patriarchs, the fathers served as prophet, priest, and king. They received revelations from God. They built altars and offered sacrifices. They ruled as sovereigns over their children and servants. It made sense for children to respect and obey their fathers.

In the Age of Moses, children were commanded by Law to obey both their parents. This is called the "first commandment with promise" (Eph. 6:2.) Once again there is an element of common sense in this command. Those who have never learned the discipline of obedience, make poor rulers. A country cannot long survive with undisciplined leaders. Consequently, every nation is always only a couple of generations away from national disaster. If, however, the children of Israel obeyed their parents, their days would be long in the land which the Lord their God was giving to them (Ex. 20:12.)

It is also worthy of note that the Law of Moses forbade adultery. God wanted every child to have the benefit of both a father and a mother. He also forbade coveting anything that was a part of your neighbor's household. These commands were given to protect the family. When someone covets his neighbor's wife, servant, ox, ass or any part of his household, he is threatening the very fabric of society.

Even in the Christian Age, children are commanded to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20, etc.) Jesus set a good example in that He was subject to His parents (Lk. 2:51.)

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

As we have pointed out before, there are two creations. One of them is material, and the other is spiritual. One of them can be seen with human eyes, and the other cannot. Paul wrote:

"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Cor. 4:18.)

One of the reasons why God made man the way He did, and the woman the way He did, was to teach us spiritual and eternal truth.

Notice these analogies to be made between Adam and Jesus. Both were in God's image. Both were destined to have dominion over the earth. Both are progenitors of a race of people. Adam begat a physical race. Jesus begat a spiritual race. Both are bridegrooms. Adam's bride was created by God from his open side, and Jesus purchased His bride when His side was opened at Calvary. The book of Romans calls Adam a "figure" of Christ. In I Corinthians Jesus is called the "last Adam."

As we have said before, "to know," from the Biblical point of view, means to be intimate with, so that a new life is produced. Thus Adam "knew" his wife; and she conceived and bare Cain. It is not by accident that "knowing Jesus" means to be born again. It is not by random chance that the church is known as the "Bride of Christ." The whole analogy between Christianity and marriage is too utterly profound and beautiful for words. It cannot adequately be described, it can only be experienced. To experience the one, is to gain insight into the other.

The Hebrew word "glory" is "kabod." This is easy to remember, because when the glory of the Lord departed from Israel, a little boy was born named "Ichabod." This word means "no glory." The word "kabod," literally means "heavy," and is so translated a number of times in the Hebrew Bible. When the people saw the presence of God come down on the Tabernacle, they said "kabod," or "heavy." The experience was profound. They could not explain what happened to someone else. Others would have to come to the Tabernacle and experience the reality of God for themselves.

In this regard it is significant to remember that the woman is the "glory" of man (I Cor. 11:7.) The sexual union of husbands and wives is more accurately experienced than explained. After Paul wrote about husbands loving their wife, and wives submitting to their husbands, he said he was really speaking about Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32.)

It is important for both husbands and wives to recognize the unique role of matrimony in the eyes of God. God may very well be providing guidance to you through your mate.

BY THEIR FRUITS

Jesus offers a very wise way to evaluate someone's teaching. He said: **"Ye shall know them by their fruits"** (Matt. 7:16.) It is sometimes difficult to tell what a seed will produce until it is planted. The same is true of ideas. Many ideas sound good until they start producing fruit in the laboratory of life.

Take, for example, the teaching of the late Robert Owen. Mr. Owen lived in the nineteenth century. He was a wealthy man with benevolent intentions. He had a bold and outrageous theory which he felt would revolutionize society. He wanted to abolish marriage, religion, and the private ownership of property. He reasoned that without marriage, there could be no adultery. Without religion there would be no mental and emotional problems produced by guilt. Without owning, it would be impossible to steal.

Inspired by the passion of his own ideas, he offered his theories to the governments of America and Europe. He visited foreign countries and communicated directly with men of power and prominence. He was privileged to present an explanatory memorial to the Congress of sovereigns at Aix la Chappelle. He had extensive interviews with Prince Metternich of Austria. The Government of Mexico was considering an experimental commune in what is now the state of California.

Owens great experiment was finally put to the test in Indiana. In 1824 he bought the village of New Harmony, and 30,000 acres. This property had previously belonged to a group known as "Rappites." Mr. Owen was so confident of success that he predicted that the city of Cincinnati would be depopulated within three short years.

He was wrong! His theories did not work! His grandiose plans did not transform New Harmony, Indiana into a model community. Under the guidance and direction of Robert Owen, New Harmony was a failure. One might be fooled by the writings of Robert Owen, but no one should be confused by what his writing produced.

The same can be said of the writings of the late Mao Tse-tung. His Little Red Book was read by millions. Many "intellectuals" on the college campus were infatuated by his theories. There was nothing

infatuating, however, about his "fruit." Many were fooled by his writings, but no one should be fooled by China. Jesus was right! We can best know what teachers are like by the fruit which their teachings produce.

LOIS, EUNICE, AND TIMOTHY

Paul had many traveling companions, but none was as close to him as Timothy. Paul wrote: **"But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you . . . for I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state" (Phil. 2:19-20.)** The unfeigned faith of this uncommon man, dwelt first in his grandmother, Lois. Then this faith was passed on to his mother, Eunice (See II Tim. 1:5.) Finally, the family faith was personalized in Timothy himself.

A beautiful tribute to his family is found in II Tim. 3:14-15.

"But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 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."

The word translated as "child" in the King James Version, is rendered "infancy" in the New International Version. It is the Greek word "brephos," and is found only eight times in the New Testament Scriptures. This unique word refers either to an unborn child, or to a baby at the time of its birth. It is the word which Dr. Luke used to describe John the Baptist before he was born. Luke 1:41,44 refer to the "babe" which leaped in its mother's womb at the salutation of Mary. This is also the word used to describe the baby Jesus at the time of His birth. The sheperds were told: **"Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes . . . "** (Lk. 2:12.)

Modern medicine is discovering what the ancients knew many years ago. Infants can learn inside of their mother's womb. Timothy knew the holy scriptures from the time he was a "brephos." His unfeigned faith dwelt first in his grandmother, and then in his mother. Paul did not want him to forget where his faith came from. He told him to continue in the things which he had learned **"KNOWING OF WHOM THOU HAST LEARNED THEM; AND THAT FROM A CHILD THOU HAS KNOWN THE HOLY SCRIPTURES WHICH ARE ABLE TO MAKE THEE WISE UNTO SALVATION THROUGH FAITH WHICH IS IN CHRIST JESUS."**

The next verses reminded Timothy that:

"All Scripture is given by inspiration and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."

THINGS THAT HAPPEN IN THE WOMB

The importance of the family is underscored by the number of things which the Scriptures teach take place in the womb:

- Nations are formed - Gen. 25:23
- Blessings are given - Gen. 49:23
- Vows are begun - Jud. 13:5, 7; 16:17
- God forms children - Is. 44:2, 24; 49:5; Job 31:15
- Children are committed to God - Ps. 22:9-10
- Rewards are given - Ps. 127:3
- God covers children - Ps. 138:13
- The Spirit is given - Eccl. 11:5
- Children are called - Is. 49:1
- Children are known by God - Jer. 1:5
- Eunuchs are formed - Matt. 19:12
- Children are filled with the Holy Spirit - Lk. 1:15
- Jesus was conceived - Lk. 1:31
- Babes leap - Lk. 1:41
- Children struggle - Hos. 12:3
- Paul was separated and called - Gal. 1:15
- Etc.

It is sad beyond words that because of abortion, the most dangerous place for a baby to be is inside of its mother's womb.

J. RUSSELL MORSE

The late J. Russell Morse is among the most famous missionaries of modern times. He went to China in 1921. He was accompanied by his wife, Gertrude, and infant son, Eugene. Though Bro. Morse has passed away, his family continues the work which he began. Today, literally hundreds of thousands of people are Christians as the result of the work done the Morse family. The Reader's Digest published a book about this remarkable family called "Exodus to a Hidden Valley."

While Bro. Morse was living, I was privileged to do a series of video interviews with him. They are available through Good News Productions, Intl. in Joplin, Missouri.

Brother Morse gave much credit for his amazing ministry to his mother. She had been barren for fourteen years before his birth. Filled with faith, however, she went forward in a Gospel Meeting and asked for prayer. She promised God that if He would give her a son, she would dedicate him to missions. God answered her prayer, and she kept her promise. Brother Morse, was therefore destined to be a missionary before he was even conceived. His mother, of course, was used of God to provide guidance for his life. When he needed financial assistance, she was used of God to help provide this too. When China was taken over by the communists, Bro. Morse was placed in solitary confinement for 458 days. No matter where he was, however, he never forgot the foundation of faith which had been given him by his mother. In the last days of his life, when his brilliant mind was failing, he never forgot his mother. He was much like Timothy in this regard.

An unknown author has written this beautiful tribute to mothers:

"To my mother. She loved me before I was born. She took God's hand in hers and walked

through the valley of shadows that I might live. She bathed me when I was helpless, clothed me when I was naked, fed me when I was hungry, rocked me when I was weary, and sang to me with the voice of an angel. She held my hand when I learned to walk. She suffered with my sorrow, and laughed with my joy. She glowed with my triumph, and while I knelt at her side, she taught my lips to pray. Through all the days of my youth, she gave me strength for my weakness, courage for my despair, and hope to fill my hopeless heart. She was loyal when others failed. She was true when tried by fire. She was my friend when other friends were gone. She prayed for me through all the days, whether flooded with sunshine, or saddened by shadows. Though we lay down our lives for her, we can never pay the debt which we owe to a mother."

JACOB

Jacob, the father of the twelve patriarchs, gathered his sons together to tell them what would happen to them in the last days (Gen. 49:1.) It needs to be emphasized that Jacob was not directing their destiny, he was merely the vehicle that God was using to provide information and guidance about their future.

This remarkable chapter is worthy of a study in great depth. Hopefully, this brief survey will whet your appetite for such a project. For the present time, however, we merely seek to point out that Jacob was a vehicle which God used to provide information and guidance for his family.

- Reuben, his firstborn, would not be in a position of leadership because he defiled his father's couch (Gen 49:3-5.)
- Simeon and Levi united to massacre the people of Shechem (Gen. 34:) Because of their cruelty, they would be divided and scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:5-7.)
- The sceptre would not depart from Judah. Like a young lion growing into maturity, this tribe would develop into the dominant tribe from which Christ would be born (Gen. 49:8-12.)
- Zebulun would dwell near the sea and become involved in shipping (Gen. 49:13.)
- Issachar would not seek for political power, but would be content with manual labor (Gen. 49:14-15.)
- Dan would "judge his people." That is, the tribe would govern itself without the help of others. These people would deal treacherously with their enemies, like a snake bites a horse's heels and causes the rider to fall backward (Gen. 49:16-18.)
- Gad would possess tenacity and strength in battle. This would enable this tribe to ultimately triumph over their enemies (Gen. 49:19.)
- Asher would inherit the most fertile lands and thus be "fat," and provide bread and "royal dainties" for others (Gen. 49:20.)

- Naphtali would possess the freedom and speed of a "hind let loose" (Gen. 49:21.)
- Joseph would be richly blessed like a fruitful bough by a well. His sons would be like branches covering a wall. The prosperity of Joseph is thought to be typify the triumph of Christ and His church (Gen. 49:22-26.)
- The beloved Benjamin would be like a ravening wolf. His cruelty would be symbolized by the rape and murder of the Levite's wife and war with the other tribes (see Judges 19:-20: and Gen. 49:27.)

The point is, that if God gave guidance to a family through one father, He might choose to do so again.

An unknown author as penned these poignant words about his father:

4 years: My Daddy can do anything.
 7 years: My Dad know a lot, a whole lot.
 8 years: Dad doesn't know quite everything.
 12 years: Oh well, naturally Father doesn't understand.
 14 years: Father? Hopelessly old fashioned!
 21 years: Oh, that man is out-of-date: What would you expect?
 25 years: He comes up with a good idea now and then.
 30 years: Must find out what Dad thinks about it.
 35 years: A little patience; let's get Dad's input first.
 50 years: What would Dad have thought about that?
 60 years: I wish I could talk it over with Dad once more.

TO THOSE IN NON CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

Those who are Christians, in a non-Christian family, have a special opportunity to witness for Christ. The positive change in your life is a powerful witness.

Peter wrote that a wife can convert her husband "without the word." As the poet has said, we would rather see a sermon, than hear one any day. After admonishing slaves to be subject to their own masters, Peter wrote:

"Likewise, ye wives, be in submission to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spriit, which is in the sight of God a great price" (I Pet. 3:1-4.)

Sin did at least two things. First, it separated man from God. Second, it also separated man from one

another. The word "religion," literally means to "bind back." True religion first of all restores our broken relationship with God, and then with our fellow men.

It is the plan of God to unite this fragmented universe in Jesus Christ. This is specifically stated in Eph. 1:10. God is going to gather together in Christ, not only the divided elements and individuals of earth, but also of the heavens as well.

The plan of God to accomplish this glorious objective not only involves the church, it also involves the family. The Scriptures teach: **"But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8.)**

BERT AND LUCY OTT

Bert and Lucy Ott provide a beautiful example of the way the Holy Spirit can work in marriage. In this instance, Bert was the first to give himself to Christ. The change in his life was so dramatic that Lucy was initially afraid that he had lost his mind. For a few days, she even refused to sleep in the same bed with him. Soon, however, she realized that every change in his life was something positive and good. His violent temper was gone. His care and consideration of her was too wonderful for words. Soon, she too received Christ as her Lord.

It was my privilege to visit Bert and Lucy in their small apartment in Eisingen, Germany. Lucy was dying of muscular dystrophy. She had been sick for ten years, and was in the last stages of this debilitating illness. The purpose of my visit was to video tape their testimony of the wonderful way God worked in their marriage. These videos are also available through Good News Productions, Intl. in Joplin, Mo. Lucy required total care. She could not even take a bite of food without help.

Somehow, Lucy found the strength to speak of the grace of God, and the love of her husband. She had known her husband, both before and after he had received Christ. The transformation in his life made him a living miracle. From the day of his conversion, until the day of her death, he loved her in the same way that Christ loved the church.

We finished our last session at about 2:00 in the morning. In spite of the lateness of the hour, and our exhaustion, Lucy asked Bert to play the song: "To God be the Glory." We finished our day by focusing on God. No matter how much we love our family, our major focus must still be on God. A proper worship of God will only serve to make us better members of our family.

Please prayerfully consider these beautiful and profound words of C. H. Spurgeon. He wrote them in 1855 and the tender age of twenty-five.

"It has been said by someone that the proper study of man is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the mind in the contemplation of the

Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all of our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity. Other subject we can compass and grapple with; in them we feel a kind of self-content, and go our way with the thought, 'Behold I am wise.' But when we come to this master-science, finding that our plumb-line cannot sound its depth, and that our eagle eye cannot see its height, we turn away with the thought that vain man would be wise, but he is like a wild ass's colt; and with solemn exclamation, 'I am but of yesterday, and know nothing.' No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God . . .

But while the subject humbles the mind, it also expands it. He who often thinks of God, will have a larger mind than the man who simply plods around this narrow globe . . . The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ and Him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity. Nothing will so enlarge the intellect, nothing so magnify the whole soul of man, as the devout, earnest, continued investigation of the great subject of the Deity.

And, whilst humbling and expanding, this subject is eminently consolatory. Oh, there is, in contemplating Christ, a balm for every wound; in musing on the Father, there is a quietness for every grief; and in the influence of the Holy Ghost, there is a balsam for every sore. Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go, plunge yourself in the Godhead's deepest sea; be lost in His immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated . . . "

As you seek for guidance from God, please prayerfully consider that He may give it to you through your own family.

CHAPTER XI

GUIDANCE FROM THE CHURCH

The church of the Lord Jesus is the Body of which He is the Head. It is described in Scripture as **"The house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth" (I Tim. 3:15.)** Certainly Jesus uses His church as a vehicle to give guidance to His people. It must be remembered, however, that the guidance comes from Him. He is the Head of His Body. He maintains contact directly with every member, but He has also granted spiritual gifts. Gifted individuals in the Body may be used of God to provide guidance for others.

It is important to remember that every Christian has received the Holy Spirit, and has a special function to perform. There are no vestigial organs in the Body of Christ. Every believer has a unique ministry and purpose. Please consider the following Scriptures:

- **"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to EVERY man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to EVERY man the measure of faith" (Rom. 12:3.)**
- **"But EVERY man hath his proper gift of God" (I Cor. 7:7.)**
- **"But unto EVERY one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ" (Eph. 4:7.)**
- **"As EVERY man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (I Pet. 4:10.)**
- **Etc.**

The Holy Spirit is for every Christian. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His (Rom. 8:9.) The guidance of God can therefore come from any member of His Body. Since God is Sovereign, He can give guidance any way He wants to! It can come from the Scriptures, or apart from the Scriptures. It can come from within the church, or without the church. God can speak through a donkey (Nu. 22:28.) He can speak through a demented man like Shimei (II Sam. 16:10.) As we have said, God can give guidance any way He wants to. This chapter, however, will focus on guidance through the church. But we will not deal with the church in a corporate sense. We will view the church as saved and gifted individuals, regardless of where they live or worship. We will try to see the church as God does. Our perspective will not be limited by racial, social, or denominational limitations, but will cross all boundaries.

This will be an important distinction. Note, for example, the difference between Christianity and Judaism. The two cannot be combined. To attempt to do so would be like trying to put new wine in old skins, or new cloth in an old garment. Judaism was an "organization." Christianity is an "organism." The structure of Judaism remained constant. Its rules and rituals were rigid and inflexible. The performance of this divine liturgy did not depend upon the character, or spirituality of those involved in it. Caiaphas, for example, was

an integral part of Judaism, even though he was a very wicked man. The Scriptures teach that God spoke through him, not because he was godly, but because he was the High Priest (see John 11:51.)

Christianity, by contrast, is a divine organism. As a living entity it possesses the ability to change and adapt. It is flexible like new wine skins. While Judaism was composed of holy things and holy rituals, Christianity is composed of holy people. The spiritual life of every member is, therefore, vitally important. Caiaphas could continue to function as a Jewish priest in spite of his sin. He could not do so as a Christian. Christians who lose personal integrity are severed from Christ and fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4.) The living structure of Christianity is not determined by "conformation," but by "transformation ."

RECOGNIZING THE BODY OF CHRIST

Jesus told Nicodemus that he could not see the Kingdom of God until he was born again. Even then, the unique nature of God's reign is not easily discerned. The late W. Carl Ketcherside reminded his readers that the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation. He wrote:

"In the midst of the maelstrom of activity with the hum of party machinery and the buzz of political maneuvering, I seem to hear the whisper of a still small voice from the bygone centuries, warning as of yore. 'If they tell you, He is there in the wilderness, do not go out; if they say, He is there in the inner room, do not believe it.' The unity for which Jesus prayed is not a project of conventions nor a product of councils. It cannot be drafted, dictated or documented. It cannot be voted in, voted out, or even voted on. There will come no hour when men can affix their signatures to a declaration and say, 'This is it!'

We are trained and conditioned to think only in terms of organization. We can do nothing without conclaves and charters, laws and by-laws. And we are tempted to think that because we have been imbued with the spirit of organization that our structures are organizations of the Spirit . . ."

In some respects many are living B.C. lives, in an A.D. world. Jesus commissioned us "make disciples," but we feel more comfortable "establishing churches." We feel that we have not done something until people can see something. Consequently, a visible organization is high on our agenda. A Bible class with only ten people may have a rather elaborate structure with a president, vice-president, and secretary.

It is possible, as you know, to establish a church without making disciples. It is not possible, however, to make disciples without establishing a church. The church, in some respects, is a by-product.

NOT LIKE EARTHLY GOVERNMENTS

Jesus taught that His followers would not be like an earthly government. He said: **"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and the 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" (Lk. 22:25-26.)**

Jesus set the example in this regard. Though He was God, He emptied Himself and became a man.

He was among us as one that served. He did not come to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life as a ransom for many. He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He was "one of us." He was helped by women like Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, and many others (Lk. 8:2-3.) He asked for help from mortal men like Peter, James, and John (Matt. 26:38.)

Those who follow in His steps will be part of a unique fellowship.

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY

There was a time when I felt that a strong ecclesiastical structure was an essential ingredient in Christianity. I believed, for example, that every missionary, or evangelist, needed to be under the oversight of an eldership. I had been taught this in college. The text for this was Acts 13: Barnabas and Saul were sent out by the church at Antioch, and seemed to "report in," every time they got a chance. For years I assumed that they served under the elders of that congregation. Now, I conclude, this was an invalid assumption. As a matter of fact, it cannot be proven from Scripture that the church at Antioch even had elders.

A turning point in my own thinking came while studying the Greek word "paradidomi." This is the word the Holy Spirit used to describe the relationship of Barnabas and Saul to the church at Antioch. It is found 120 times in the New Testament Scriptures. It literally means to "give over." It is primarily used of being given over to judgment and death. Pilate, for example, gave over Jesus to be crucified. He even symbolized this transfer of responsibility by washing his hands.

The King James Version indicates that Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from which they had been "recommended," to the grace of God.

(Barnabas and Saul) " . . . thence sailed to Antioch, from when they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled" (Acts 14:26.)

A similar usage is found later:

"And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God" (Acts 15:40.)

Remember, the word "recommended" is "paradidomi" which means "to give over." These Scriptures teach that these godly men were given over to the grace of God. The church could not control them, but they expected God to. The church recognized that these men had been called by the Holy Spirit to do a great work for God. They knew that might never see them again this side of heaven. They did not have radios, telegraphs, or telephones. They did not have fax machines or e-mail. When they were separated by a mere one hundred yards their lines of communication were broken. They knew, however, that the Lord would never leave them or forsake them. Jesus had promised to be with them until the end of the age. Since Jesus would be with them, He could give them guidance directly, without having to go through an eldership, or church board. Therefore they "recommended" them to the grace of God. They turned them over to the Sovereign of the Universe to give them help and guidance.

This truth is so obvious and simple that one doesn't have to understand a syllable of Greek in order to see it. I would have seen it much sooner myself, if I had not so blinded by tradition. God, of course, can give guidance to missionaries any way He wants to. In the case, however, He gave it directly and not through the church at Antioch.

THE LORD'S CHURCH IS COMPOSED OF INDIVIDUALS

As we said, we shall not be focusing on the church in an organizational, or corporate sense. We shall focus on individuals. Gifted people in the Body of Christ do not derive their "authority" from a hierarchical structure. They receive it from Jesus. We must guard against the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes. The word "Nicolaitan" is a compound of the Greek words for "ruler," and "people." It apparently refers to those in the church who try to dominate others. This doctrine appeared in the church at Ephesus, and the Scriptures teach that the Lord hates it (Rev. 2:6.)

Over a period of several generations, men lost sight of the model of Jesus as a Servant Leader. They climbed the ecclesiastical ladder to positions of power and authority. These men had so much power that they were feared by the people. This is why they were called "Reverend." The word "reverend" means to be feared. It is only found once in the Bible (Ps. 111:9,) and in this instance it refers to God. This verse declares that the name of God is holy and reverend. The Hebrew word is "yaw-ray." It comes from the root which means to fear. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but there is something wrong with fearing men. The writer of Hebrews said it boldly: **"The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:6.)**

Dominating others is also seen in the world of politics. Mao-Tse-tung built an empire on the premise that political power grows out of the muzzle of a gun. When his fellow citizens would not submit to him, he murdered them by the millions. His efforts, of course, failed. Alexander the Great tried a similar philosophy in previous generation, and he also failed. So did Caesar, Charlemagne, Napoleon, Hitler, and many others. All of these earthly dictators tried to build a kingdom by means of force. Jesus, as you know, built His Kingdom upon love. He did not come to be served, but to serve others, and to give His life as a ransom for many. He was not seeking for political power. His kingdom was not of this world. The devil offered Him with this kind of power, but Jesus refused it. Earthly kingdoms will fail, and political power will vanish, but the Kingdom of Christ shall never be destroyed.

AN IMPORTANT MEETING IN JERUSALEM

There are those who seek to justify an authoritarian church by reference to the to a meeting in Jerusalem which has been called, "The Jerusalem Council." This meeting is described in Acts 15:. The word "council," however, is not used in the Bible to describe it. "Council" appears twenty-three times in the Authorized Version of the English Bible. Not once is it used with reference to Christianity. It is used of Jewish councils, and Roman councils, but never of Christian councils. The word "council" has a legal tone which is apparently inappropriate for Christianity. In my judgement, this important meeting does not establish authoritarianism, it does just the opposite. Instead of rallying believers around an authoritarian church, it pointed them to God, and the unifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The story begins in Antioch. This was apparently the first "integrated" church. That is, it was the first

church where both Jews and gentiles worshiped together. Some feel this is why the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (Acts 11:26.) Certain men came down from Judea and insisted that you had to be circumcised according to the Law of Moses in order to be saved. Paul and Barnabas had a big dispute with them about the matter, and they determined to go up to Jerusalem to the Apostles and elders about this question.

The problem was solved, and Jewish and gentile converts were recognized as one. Please note, however, that the Holy Spirit played an important role in this unity. What men think, is not as important as what the Holy Spirit has done.

Those who believed, who were of the sect of the Pharisees, wanted to solve the question in a legalistic manner. They insisted that it was necessary to be circumcised, and to keep the Law of Moses. After much discussion, Peter pointed them to the work of the Holy Spirit. He reminded them of his experience with Cornelius. The reality of the relationship of these gentiles with God was validated, not by legalism, nor by circumcision, but by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:9.)

Barnabas and Paul also appealed to the work of the Holy Spirit. They told of the miraculous signs and wonders which God had done through them among the gentiles (Acts 15:12.) They spoke of a unity which was not produced by man, but by the Holy Spirit. This is why Christian unity is called in Scripture, the "unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3.)

After the remarks of Barnabas and Paul, James remembered a prophecy of Amos. Centuries before, God had predicted that he was going to rebuilt the tabernacle of David. He also prophesied that a residue of people among the gentiles would call upon His name. Hundreds of years before their historic meeting, God had already determined the answer to their burning question. The gentiles did not have to become Jews, before they could become Christians. They did not have to be circumcised, or to keep the Law of Moses.

Of all the theological disagreements that have taken place in Christianity, none has been more critical than this. This dispute is not only prominent in the book of Acts, it is also an integral part of the Christian Epistles. There was an imminent danger that the infant church would be divided like the proverbial child in Solomon's court. Fortunately, God guided them in such a way that the unity of the One Body was preserved.

The descendants of Abraham felt a strong compulsion to keep the covenant of circumcision. This covenant, as you know, was to be an "everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:13.) Those who were not descendants of Abraham, however, were not included in this covenant. While everyone is not a descendant of Abraham, everyone is a descendant of Noah. Therefore they went back beyond the Law of Moses, and the covenant of circumcision, to what was considered as the "Noachian Covenant." When Noah and his family came out of the ark, they were given only four basic prohibitions. They were to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from fornication. They concluded that only these four things were necessary for all believers.

It is important to remember that this decision was made by a unique group which can never be assembled again. It was composed of the Apostles, elders, and the whole church (Acts 15:22.) Remember also that they were also guided by the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:28.) The true church is not held together by the councils of man, but by the power of the Holy Spirit.

SALVATION IS NOT IN AN EARTHLY ORGANIZATION

We have already pointed out that "True Church" is composed of "individuals," not "groups." No one is saved by a denomination, but by a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It is far more important that our names be written in heaven, than on earth. The Lord knows them that are His. His sheep are scattered throughout every nation, kindred, people, and tongue, but the Lord knows each and every one by name. He calls them, and they follow Him.

In the days of King Ahab, the nation of Israel seemed to be completely steeped in idolatry. Elijah thought he was the only man on earth who had remained true to God. He was wrong! There were seven thousand that had not bowed the knee to Baal or kissed his image. Elijah did not know about them, but God did! The same has been true in every generation. True believers are always known to God, but not always to the rest of us.

It needs to be emphasized, that no one can become a part of the "True Church" unless they are added to it by God (Acts 2:47.) The Lord always knows them that are His, but we do not. Our judgment is imperfect. We cannot always tell who is, and who is not, a true Christian.

In the Jerusalem church, for example, Ananias, and Sapphira were apparently members in good standing. God, however, knew that they were deceivers (see Acts 5:) From the human point of view, they seemed to be wonderful Christians. They worshiped, prayed, studied, and served like thousands of others. They even appeared to be generous. They sold a possession, and brought part of the money, and laid it at the apostle's feet. God, however, knew their hearts. He knew they were hypocrites! They could not lie to God and get by with it. Both, as you know, were struck dead. No one was saved by worshiping with the church in Jerusalem, they were saved individually by their personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Simon the Sorcerer lived in Samaria. He believed the preaching of Philip, and was baptized (Acts 8:13.) Jesus said that those who believed and were baptized would be saved (Mark 16:16) He might have fooled us, but he did not fool God. The Scriptures teach that he was in the gall of bitterness, and the bond of iniquity. His heart was not right with God (Acts 8:18-23.) He too was not saved because he happened to be with the right group. He was judged as an individual, just like all of us will be.

The Corinthian Church was called the "church of God." They were "enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge." They came behind in no gift, had been called into the fellowship of His Son, and would be presented "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (See I Cor. 1:1-9) The church, however, had so many problems that most "loyal" preachers would be ashamed to be associated with it. Consider this brief survey of some problems in the Corinthian Church. They were divided over human leaders (I Cor. 1:11 ff.) This division was so deep and serious that Paul could not even name the people who were involved. He "transferred" the matter to himself and Apollos in order to teach them (I Cor. 4:6.) Paul was afraid that he would find the Corinthians in "debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults" (II Cor. 12:20.) They tolerated a type of fornication in the church that was not even acceptable among the Gentiles (I Cor. 5:1-2.) They were taking their brethren to pagan courts (I Cor. 6:) They had problems with marriage (I Cor. 7:) They had problems with idolatry (I Cor. 8:) They denied the apostleship of Paul (I Cor. 9:) They had problems over the work of women in the church (I Cor. 11: and 14:) Their observance of the Lord's Supper was so bad that they would have been better off to have stayed home (I Cor. 11:17.) Some among

them were smitten by God with death because of the way they took the Lord's Supper (I Cor. 12:30.) They had problems over spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:- 14:) Some among them did not even believe in the resurrection (I Cor. 15:12.)

There is an irrational assumption that churches in Bible times were "pure," because they were established, or taught by inspired men. Obviously, this was not true. Every individual in the First Century needed the grace of God, and so did every assembly. No church in the first century, or any century, can be completely pure in doctrine and practice.

People in every generation have been forced to worship in imperfect congregations. That's the only kind of churches there are. The same, of course, is true in our own day and age. We are not saved by a sign board, or by the doctrinal correctness of those with whom we worship. We are saved by Jesus Christ. Our salvation is secure as long as we maintain fellowship with Him. Every person, in every church, will be judged by God on the basis of their individual relationship with Jesus. individual. Every one of us will be judged in identically the same way.

THERE IS ONE BODY

"There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all . . . " (Eph. 4:4-6.)

Thomas Lindsay has written the book THE CHURCH AND THE MINISTRY IN THE EARLY CENTURIES. On pages 14-15 he offers a perspective of some early Christians regarding the unity of believers in the church of Jesus Christ.

"The unity of the Christian Church . . . is not confined within the bounds of space and time as merely material entities are. It can be present in many places at the same time, and in such a way that, as Ignatius says, 'Where Jesus Christ is, there is the whole Church.' The congregation at Corinth . . . was not a Body of Christ, for there is but one Body of Christ; not a part of the Body of Christ, for Christ is not divided; but the Body of Christ in its unity and filled with the fulness of His powers. It is in this One Body, present in every Christian society, that our Lord has placed his 'gifts' or *charismata* . . .

The Christians of the early centuries clung to this thought, and we have a long series of writers, from Victor of Rome, in the second century, down to Clement of Alexandria and Origen, who tell us that the whole Church of the redeemed with Christ and the angels, is present in the public worship of the individual congregation. The promise of the Master that where two or three were gathered together in His Name there would He be in the midst of them, was placed side by side with the thought in the Epistle to the Hebrews that believers are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses; and the combination suggested that in the simplest action of the smallest Christian fellowship there was the presence and the power of the whole Church of Christ . . . "

The thoughts of these early disciples are worthy of serious study and contemplation. Christian worship is indeed a profound experience. Consider, for example, the contrast between Jewish worship, and Christian

worship, described in Hebrews 12:18-24. In this passage we are reminded that the ancient Hebrews gathered to worship before Mt. Sinai. They were summoned by the sound of the trumpet to a mountain that quaked, and burned with fire. Anyone who dared to touch that mountain, whether man or beast, was stoned or thrust through with a spear. Even Moses was so terrified by the sight that he did exceedingly quake and fear. As awesome as that experience was, it pales into utter insignificance when compared to Christian worship. The Scriptures continue:

"Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel" (Heb. 12:22-24.)

The next time you meet with your brothers and sisters in Christ to worship God, remember that there is only One Body!

HOLD FAST

It is a common practice for Christians to seek doctrinal purity by leaving churches which they think are bad, and starting churches which they think are good. It seems to me that this is a practice without Biblical foundation, or precedent.

Consider, for example the seven churches of Asia:

- The Church at Ephesus had left its first love - Rev. 2:4.
- The Church at Pergamos had the doctrine of Balaam, and of the Nicolaitanes which God hated - Rev. 2:14-15.
- The Church at Thyatira allowed the woman, Jezebel, to teach and to seduce God's servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols - Rev. 2:20.
- The Church at Sardis had a name that they were alive, but were dead - Rev. 3:1.
- The Church at Laodicea was lukewarm, and was to be spewn out of the Lord's mouth - Rev. 3:16.

Each congregation was obviously less than perfect, yet, not once did the Holy Spirit direct anyone to leave where they were and start a loyal church. Let us focus, in particular, on the Church in Thyatira. Read again Rev. 2:18-29 for a brief catalog of their outrageous imperfections. Notice, in particular, the message of God for those who had not been corrupted by such a bad church.

"But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak, I will put upon you none other burden, but that which ye have already, hold fast till I come" (Rev. 2:24-25.)

KEEPING THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

In spite of the fact that Christians met in many different locations, they comprised but One Body. Even though their assemblies were infiltrated by corrupted individuals, the Lord has always been able to recognize His One True Body. Even though various congregations themselves became corrupted, the gates of hell have not been able to prevail against His Church.

When the Lord adds someone to His Body, they automatically are united with everyone else who is a member of His Body. Onesimus, and Philemon, for example, became united in Christ though they were miles apart. Onesimus was in Rome, and Philemon was in Colossae. Not only were they separated geographically, but also socially. Onesimus was a slave, and Philemon was his master. This great social chasm may have been a greater obstacle than anything else. These circumstances, however, did not keep them from being "one" in Christ. Fraternity is the result of paternity. They became spiritual brothers because they had the same spiritual Father.

Man does not, and cannot create spiritual unity. This is done for us by God. We are, however, commanded to **"keep the unity of the Spirit, in the bond of peace."** The Scriptures continue: **"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all (Eph. 4:3-7.)"**

ONE ANOTHER

The phrase "one another," flows like a beautiful stream throughout the Christian Scriptures. Here are a few examples. We are to:

- LOVE ONE ANOTHER - John 13:34, 35; 15:12, 17; Rom. 13:8; etc.
- BE MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER - Rom. 12:5, Eph. 4:25.
- BE KINDLY AFFECTIONED ONE TO ANOTHER - Rom. 12:10.
- PREFER ONE ANOTHER - Rom. 13:10.
- EDIFY ONE ANOTHER - Rom. 14:19; I Thess. 5:11.
- BE LIKE MINDED ONE TOWARD ANOTHER - Rom. 15:5.
- RECEIVE ONE ANOTHER - Rom. 15:7.
- ADMONISH ONE ANOTHER - Rom. 15:14; Col. 3:16.
- SALUTE ONE ANOTHER - Rom. 16:16.
- CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER - I Cor. 12:25.
- GREET ONE ANOTHER - II Cor. 13:12.
- SERVE ONE ANOTHER - Eph. 4:32.
- FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER - Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:19.
- SUBMIT ONE TO ANOTHER - Eph. 5:21.
- COMFORT ONE ANOTHER - I Thess. 4:18.
- EXHORT ONE ANOTHER - I Thess. 4:18.
- CONFESS FAULTS ONE TO ANOTHER - James 5:16.
- PRAY ONE FOR ANOTHER - James 5:16.
- HAVE COMPASSION ONE FOR ANOTHER - I Pet. 3:8.
- USE HOSPITALITY ONE TO ANOTHER - I Pet. 4:9.
- MINISTER . . . TO ONE ANOTHER - I Pet. 4:10.

- BE SUBJECT ONE TO ANOTHER - I Pet. 5:5.

In the negative sense we are not to consume one another (Gal. 5:15,) provoke or envy one another (Gal. 5:26,) speak evil of one another (Ja. 4:11,) or grudge one another (Ja. 5:9.)

GUESS WHO?

He was born in difficult and turbulent times and grew up with an overwhelming passion to serve his country. As a young man he was a choir boy, idolized his local preacher, and dreamed of someday becoming a preacher. As a small boy he would stand on a kitchen chair and deliver long and passionate sermons.

The passing of his mother was one of the most dramatic events of his early life. She died on the 21st of December in the light of their Christmas tree. Her attending physician said that in all his career he had never seen anyone so touch with grief, as was her son.

This young man was described as a friendly and charming person who took an interest in the fate of every companion. He was also said to be good hearted and helpful. He had a natural liking for dogs and children, and dogs and children seem to naturally return his affection.

A turning point in his life came when he was blinded during a terrible war. He wept profusely in the hospital. It was the first time he had cried since the death of his mother eleven years before. In the agony of his blindness he prayed for sight and made a special promise to God. He promised God that should he regain his sight, he would devote himself to public life. He did regain his sight, and he did devote himself to his people.

This man was a strict vegetarian, and his commitment to his people caused him to refuse marriage. He asked that his people fear God, and nothing else. He gave generously to the poor and cried out "praised be Jesus Christ." He was even said to have given his own clothing to those who were less fortunate.

He hated trash literature and felt a special kinship with God in rejecting the lukewarm, and spewing them out. One while carrying a whip, he nearly imagined himself to be Jesus Christ scourging the corrupt in the Temple of God.

He was brought to trial because of his convictions. He wanted to take his cause to the Court of God, the eternal last court of Judgment: "before which we are ready to take our stand, then from our bones, from our graves, will sound the voice of the tribunal which alone has the right to sit in Judgment upon us . . ."

He was sentenced to jail, but remained resolute and firm to his convictions. While in jail he began to write a book that would sell 10,000 copies the first six weeks it was in print. The book described his struggle against what he described as "narrow mindedness and personal spite."

He was worshiped and adored by millions. He was perhaps the greatest mover of his century. England's Sir Arnold Wilson said of him: "Under his influence, infant mortality was greatly reduced, TB and other diseases diminished, criminal courts never had so little to do, and prisons never had so few occupants." He was the first man in history to promote modern urban planning and anti-pollution devices for cities.

Who was he? Adolph Hitler!

Every one of these incredible statements has been taken, almost verbatim, from a two volume history, ADOLF HITLER, by John Toland. Toland is a Pulitzer Prize winning author. His carefully documented book was published by Doubleday and Co. in Garden City, N.Y. in 1976.

The point is, that everybody who claims to be a Christian, isn't. Those who are truly, "born of God," or "begotten of God," have certain unmistakable characteristics.

Consider the following Biblical attributes of those "born of God," or "begotten of God," as they are recorded in I John:

- Everyone that doeth righteousness is born of God (I John 2:29.)
- Whoever is begotten of God does not abide in sin (I John 3:9.)
- Everyone that loveth is begotten of God (I John 4:7.)
- Those begotten of God love others begotten of God (I John 5:1.)
- Those begotten of God overcome the world (I John 5:4.)
- Those begotten of God, keep themselves, and the wicked one touches them not (I John 5:18.)

The Greek word translated as "born," or "begotten," is "gennao." It is used both of a man impregnating a woman, and a woman giving birth. In either case, it is obvious that a child inherits something from his father.

Jesus told the Jews that their father was the devil. He could tell that by the way they behaved. The devil was a liar, and a murderer, and they were the same (John 8:44.)

The children of God have his "seed," or "sperm." This is why we become more and more like Him.

Dr. A. W. Tozer expressed it beautifully:

"Christians have often been accused of being reactionary because they cannot get up an enthusiasm over the latest scheme that someone thinks up to bring in the millennium. Well, it's not to be wondered at. A real Christian is an odd number anyway. He feels supreme love for one whom he has never seen; talks familiarly every day to someone he cannot see; expects to go to heaven on the virtue of another; empties himself in order to be full. He admits he is wrong so he can be declared right. He goes down in order to get up; is strongest when he is weakest, richest when he is poorest, and happiest when he feels the worst. He dies so he can live, forsakes in order to have, gives away so he can keep. HE sees the invisible, hears the inaudible and knows that which passes knowledge. The man who has met God is not looking for something. He has found it. He is not searching for the light. Upon him the light has already shone. His certainty may seem bigoted, but his assurance is that of one

who knows by experience. His religion is not hearsay, he is not a copy, not a facsimile. He is an original from the hand of the Holy Ghost."

"Notwithstanding in this rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Lk. 10:20.)

CHAPTER XII

SIN

Sin is a primary weapon used by the wicked one to short circuit the guidance of God. Adam and Eve were alienated from God by sin. Their beautiful fellowship with the Father was destroyed. Sin not only separated them from God, it also separated them from one another. The world's first murder came from a domestic dispute within their own family.

John classifies sin in three categories:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (I John 2:15-17.)

The three categories of sin are:

- The lust of the flesh
- The lust of the eyes
- The pride of life

The devil deceived Eve in all three ways. He told her that the forbidden fruit was: good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desired to make one wise. (Gen. 3:6.) Adam was not deceived, but sinned anyhow (I Tim. 2:14.) Their sin separated them from God.

Jesus faced the same three temptations in the wilderness. This remarkable story is recorded in Matthew 4:, Mark 1:, and Luke 4: Jesus was tempted to turn stones into bread and satisfy the lust of His flesh. He was shown all the kingdoms of this world and was thus tempted by the lust of the eyes. He was challenged to leap from a pinnacle of the temple and become a national celebrity. Praise God! Jesus rejected all temptations! He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet He was without sin (Heb. 4:15.)

The closer we are to God, the easier it is to understand Him. He wants to be near us, and to share His wisdom and guidance with us. The wicked one wants to keep us away from God. One way the devil can do this, is with sin.

Now let us consider each of these three broad classifications of sin. Someone has observed that when we are overcome by some trespass, we will either change our lives, or we will change our theology. If you are involved in some sin, may the goodness of God lead you to repentance.

THE LUST OF THE FLESH

Eden's forbidden fruit was good for food. It seemed ideal to satisfy the appetites of the flesh. Carnal

appetites have often destroyed the rapport between God and man. At the time these words are being written, some of the most influential Christian ministries in the world have been severely curtailed because their leaders became involved in sexual sin. No matter when you read these words, the same will probably still be true.

A personal friend was leading a congregation of over 7,000 when he fell prey to this problem. He has repented of his sin, but the glow and the glory are gone from his ministry. Now, he is trying to put together the shattered pieces of his life and his family.

Hebrew history tells of King Balac of the Moabites. He hired Balaam, the prophet, to curse the people of God. When it became obvious that God was not going to curse His people, Balaam devised a clever plan so they would curse themselves. He taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel so that they would commit fornication and eat things sacrificed to idols (Rev. 2:14.)

The Greek word translated as "stumblingblock" is "skandalon." This refers to a trap, or a snare, and is the basis of our English word "scandal." Someone caught in a scandal is to be pitied. They have forgotten that they were created in the image of God and have been reduced to behaving like an animal.

A trapper once told me that there are three basic "lures," he used to capture his prey. First was the sex lure, then the food lure, and finally he used curiosity. Balaam taught Balac to use all three to trap the Hebrews.

It is, of course, important to know your prey. In this regard Balaam understood the people of God. He knew how to design a perfect trap to destroy them. He used the sex lure for he knew that the unmarried men were vulnerable. They were absolutely forbidden sexual expression by Mosaic Law. He also used the food lure. Balaam knew that the Hebrews were eating only manna. It was a wonderfully nourishing food, but it was the same thing every day. Balaam had the Moabites offer them something different. The Scriptures teach that they ate things that were sacrificed unto idols. He also appealed to their curiosity. The Hebrew men were undoubtedly curious about the worship of their pagan neighbors. The beautiful Moabite girls showed them things they had never seen before. Touche! Twenty three thousand died in one day (1 Cor. 10:8.)

It needs to be emphasized that the Hebrew men did not die by accident. They were trapped. They fell victim to a sinister plot under the teaching of a prophet who loved the wages of unrighteousness.

Solomon described the wiles of an adulterous woman with these words:

"With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the flattering of her lips she forced him. He goeth after her straitway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter, or as a fool to the correction of the stocks; till a dart strikes through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life" (Prov. 7:21-23.)

PLEASE DO NOT ALLOW THE WICKED ONE TO TRAP YOU WITH THE LUST OF THE FLESH!

THE LUST OF THE EYES

Eden's forbidden fruit was "pleasant to the eyes." It was good to look at. While scanning the garden, it would draw your eyes like a magnet. There was something deceptive about this beauty, however. Tasting this beautiful fruit would be fatal. It would not only bring death to Adam and Eve, but also to the whole human race. The Scriptures teach that by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. In this way death passed upon all men, for all have sinned (Rom. 5:12.)

Achan was also tempted with lust of the eyes. At the conquest of Jericho he committed a sin that brought death and destruction to his Hebrew brothers, and also to himself and his family. He explained his conduct by saying:

"When I SAW among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them . . ." (Josh. 7:21.)

He saw . . . he coveted . . . and he took that which was not his. Once again the wicked one had deceived him with a clever trap. He died for garments he could not wear, and money he could not spend.

David also fell prey to the lust of the eyes. At a time when kings went forth to battle, he stayed home. He was on his roof top at eventide when he SAW a beautiful woman washing herself (II Sam. 11:2.) Like others before and since, he saw, he coveted, and he sinned. David learned the hard way that - "the wages of sin is death."

Jesus was tempted with the lust of the eyes. The devil took Him to an exceeding high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them (Matt. 4:8.) Jesus was not only tempted with the lust of the eyes, He was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin.

Jesus once told a parable which compared the Word of God to seeds that were being sown. One reason some seeds did not produce fruit involved the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches. These "things," choked out the Word of God so that it brought no fruit unto perfection (Lk. 8:14.)

Please remember that the "things" which we see and covet, can sometimes cancel out the guidance of God. The perils of prosperity are often greater than the problems of poverty. The "things" that you have are not as dangerous as the "things" that have you. Covetousness is a form of idolatry and is often cultivated by the things which we see (Col. 3:5.)

Alexander Pope wrote:

"Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
That to be hated, needs but to be seen;
But seen too often, familiar with her face . . .
We at first abhor, then pity, then embrace."

THE PRIDE OF LIFE

There are six things that the Lord hates, and a proud look is at the top of the list (Prov. 6:16-17.) The

fear of the Lord is to hate pride (Prov. 8:13.) **"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18.)**

Pride is another of the major ways that the wicked one can short circuit the guidance of God. God wanted to guide Adam and Eve, but their pride prevented Him from doing so. Remember, the forbidden fruit was desired to make one wise (Gen. 3:6.) It not only appealed to their fleshly appetite, it appealed to their mind.

A lighter moment gave rise to this poetic verse.

The middle of the road is the place where I walk,
where no doctrinal danger can be.
It's quite lonely out here, for my brethren I fear,
are not as discerning as me.
They turn to the left, and they turn to the right,
and extremists on both hands are found.
But the middle of the road is my safe abode,
and I stay on my way, heaven bound.
While others my stray, in their pendulous ways,
and turn from the one right direction.
An accurate goal is the theme of my soul,
and I modestly maintain perfection.
The Way that is straight has but one narrow gate,
and I know that it's waiting for me.
For I humbly accord with the Way of the Lord,
and abandon all error, you see.
This terse little verse is quite popular now,
and it's message the multitudes know.
For it suits to a T, every person, you see,
whatever direction they go.

It is hard for those who "have all the answers" to learn anything . . . even from God.

PERSECUTION

Someone has observed that it is only a short step from being willing to die for a cause, and being willing to kill for it.

John Foxe has written a book on the CHRISTIAN MARTYRS OF THE WORLD. This book documents the death of thousands of believers who were tortured and killed by those who claimed to be in the "True Church." At one point in church history, the "true church" was so corrupt that it is described as the "Pornocracy" or "Rule of Harlots." Phillip Schaff, the historian, points out that Pope Sergius II had a mistress, Marozla. She, her mother Theodora, and her sister, filled the papal chair with their paramours and bastard sons and turned the papal palace into a den of robbers. Similar stories are available without number.

Paul wrote to Timothy that **"all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12.)** The context of these remarks involves the persecution which Paul received in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. This was religious persecution. Unfortunately, this same type of persecution has abounded in every century.

THE "TRUE" CHURCH

We have talked about this in a previous chapter, but the importance of the subject makes it worthy of repetition. While the Kingdom does not come by man's observation, it is crystal clear to God. Even though individual Christians seem scattered, they are seen as one by God. Even though they live in different countries, and speak different languages, they are still members of the One Body and respond in obedience to Christ. The Scriptures teach emphatically that there is only **"ONE BODY."**

In attempting to solve a problem, or understand a mystery, it is always wise to start with what we know, and then to proceed to the unknown. Let us start with the principle of life. The Scriptures teach that the body without the spirit is dead (Ja. 2:26.) This is obvious. This is a general truth which is also applicable to the church, the Body of Christ. The Body, must have The Spirit, in order to be alive. What the Spirit of Jesus began to do in the Body, the Body continues to do in the Spirit of Jesus. The Church at Sardis had a name that they were alive, but they were dead (Rev. 3:1.) Certainly, we should not expect to receive guidance from a dead church.

Death has been conquered by anything, or anyone, who is filled with the Spirit of Jesus. This was true of the physical body of Jesus. This will also be true of our physical bodies. And it is also true of the Church, The Body of Christ. The physical body of Jesus was nailed to a cross, and pierced with a spear. The Spirit, however, enabled Him to conquer death. His Spirit will also raise us up from the dead:

"But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11.)

As we said before, this same truth is applicable to the Body of Christ in a corporate sense. Jesus promised to build His church in such a way that the gates of hell would not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18.)

Jesus made this astounding statement near Caesarea Philippi. At the same time He taught them that His Church could not be destroyed by death, He also taught them that He could not be destroyed by death.

"From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day" (Matt. 16:21.)

Just as Jesus was impervious to death, so would also be the church. His Body, The Church, is the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16.) No one can arbitrarily "join" the church by his own decision. We can only be a part of the Lord's Church when He "adds" us (Acts 2:47.) The church of our blessed Lord has therefore existed in every century. It can never be destroyed. Jesus has never been a Head without a Body,

a Shepherd without sheep, or a King without subjects.

The "Spirit" manifested its life in the Body in a number of different ways. There were diversities of gifts, differences of administrations, and diversities of operations. This is explained in great detail in I Cor. 12: The manifestation of the Spirit was given to every man for the common good. Each gift, or manifestation of the Spirit, was inter related with the others. They were like members of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? Etc.

It is obvious that Christ did establish His Church as He promised. This Church became a reality on the first Pentecost following our Lord's resurrection. The event is recorded in the second chapter of Acts. It is also obvious that Jesus is the Head of His Body, the Church (Col. 1:18,) and that there is only One Body (Eph. 4:4.) This One Body encompasses all the saved, in all the world, in all generations. This Body is not only designed to minister to the world, but also to individual members within the Body. We should not be surprised when God chooses to give guidance and direction through members of His Body. This is so obvious that we need not belabor the point. God has placed within the Body of believers every spiritual gift, and ministry which is needed.

There are times, however, when God gives direct guidance, without going through the church. Consider, for example, the guidance that came from angels which is recorded in the book of Acts. It is certainly a mistake to limit God. God is the Sovereign of the Universe and can guide His people any what He wants to.

CHAPTER XIII

GO FOR IT!

The greatest journey begins with a single step - take it!

Nothing that is stationary needs guidance. The most sophisticated rocket has no need of a guidance system until it blasts off. Neither do we! A stump does not need a steering wheel. It isn't going anywhere. If we are not going anywhere, we don't need steering either.

God wants us to be on the move. The man who buried his talent was condemned. God wants to control our lives, but He wants to guide us with His eye. He wants us to be sensitive to His will. He does not want us to be like the horse and the mule, which have no understanding and must be coerced with bit and bridle (Ps. 32:8-9.) He desires that we look to Him with obedient hearts and anticipation.

God does not call us when we are qualified. He qualifies us when we are called. The task before us is never greater than the power behind us.

We know that everything God leads us to do, He can do better. He has, however, elected not to do it Himself. He gives us the privilege of working with Him in the accomplishing of His purpose. God can do things immediately, and we cannot. God can do things perfectly, and we cannot. God never gets tired, never is confused, and never runs out of time. Yet, God in His infinite wisdom, has chosen us, fallible creatures that we are, to participate with Him in His Eternal Purpose. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust, yet loving permits our involvement in matters of eternal consequence.

This is a principal ingredient of discipleship. The teacher can do it better than the student, but chooses not to. The teacher permits the student to learn by making mistakes. The ultimate goal is for the student is to be like the teacher.

"The disciple is not above his master, but every one that is perfect shall be as his master" (Lk. 6:40.)

THE CHURCH IN PIRES DE RIO

In 1969 Gerald Holmquist published a fifty-five page booklet "Pattern For Progress." His purpose was: "A restudy of the New Testament church as to its pattern and its application to the missionary enterprise." At the time, Bro. Holmquist was a veteran missionary in Brazil.

The booklet was written while on furlough, and grew out of his own personal failure and frustration. He had helped in the formation of seven new churches, and two of them had died. The others did not seem to be aflame with evangelistic fervor. He blamed himself for the lack of progress. He wrote: "Something is wrong! Part of the problem is myself. I know that my life does not burn with the spiritual intensity necessary to cause a real Brazilian movement to burst into being . . ."

A part of the blame, however, he attributed to the "pattern" he was using. Now, after renewed Bible

study, he felt that he had a better "pattern." One aspect of this new pattern he "discovered," involved evangelism without church buildings. Gerald listed twenty-six reasons why church buildings would hinder the church. While he took ten pages to cover the subject, permit me to briefly summarize his thinking.

Church buildings have a tendency to:

1. Promote an institutional rather than a spiritual image.
2. Separate the church from the everyday life of the people.
3. Take too much money.
4. Promote traditional worship.
5. Limit soul winning to church services.
6. Promote a professional clergy.
7. Promote formalism in worship.
8. Limit fellowship to formal activities.
9. Remove the leaven from the lump.
10. Separate the people into clergy, and laity.
11. Make preaching only formal discourses.
12. Separate the church and the home.
13. Create a need for an "official membership role."
14. Limit the growth of the congregation.
15. Prohibit the church from entering certain areas where it is needed.
16. Separate the church from the community.
17. Promote money making schemes.
18. Promote the use of "official names."
19. Detract from the beauty of Christ.
20. Detract from the spiritual nature of the church.
21. Create an institutional mentality.
22. Create a hindrance to spontaneous expansion.
23. Promote a fragmented and divided fellowship.
24. Create an unnatural environment for leadership training.
25. Make it difficult to practice discipline.
26. Limit opportunity for service.

Even though this is a radical condensation, it gives you an idea of his thinking. It is indeed, something to think about. I have had some of these same thoughts myself.

The point is: THE FIRST THING GERALD HOLMQUIST DID AFTER WRITING THIS BOOKLET, AND RETURNING TO BRAZIL, WAS BUY A CHURCH BUILDING! Gerald went to Pires de Rio, Brazil. God certainly has a sense of humor. He frequently leads us to do the very things we have vowed never to do. In this instance, in consultation with the "church," Gerald felt "led of God" to do something contrary to his "Pattern for Progress." God has honored that decision in remarkable ways. The church there has been an evangelistic firebrand which has resulted in the formation of over forty daughter and granddaughter congregations.

This story is a good example of several spiritual principles. In particular, note that Bro. Holmquist was not stationary. He was on the move. He was doing something. He was seeking God with his whole heart.

He was asking for wisdom and believing that the answer would come. He needed guidance, and God gave it to him. It did not come as he had anticipated, but it did come.

Each person needs to do what he did. This does not necessarily mean that we should write a booklet, or go to Brazil, etc. It means that we should be seeking for the guidance of God in our own lives. We should then do *WHAT* God leads us to do, *WHEN* God leads us to do it. God is always reliable, but never predictable. He may lead you to do something different tomorrow, from what He is leading you to do today. He may lead you to do the same thing Gerald Holmquist has done, but don't count on it.

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way" (Rom. 14:12-13.)

THE STORY OF DUANE A. MILLER

The early church had certain disciples who were distinguished by something special. Mary, for example, was the "mother of Jesus." Mary Magdalene had seven demons cast out. Simon of Cyrene carried the cross. Lazarus was raised from the dead. Barnabas sold his land and laid the money at the apostles' feet, etc.

The contemporary church also has certain disciples who are distinguished by something special. Consider the case of Duane Miller. I met him for the first time Tuesday, Nov. 28, 1995. We had never met before. I assumed that I knew nothing about him. I was wrong! Within sixty seconds I said: "I know you! You're the man whose voice God healed!" This magnificent event was providentially recorded on an audio tape. Over 50,000 copies of this tape are in circulation, and the story has been heard by many millions.

Duane is a preacher. Permit me to capsulize his testimony. After twelve years on staff at the First Baptist church in Houston, he became the Senior Pastor of a church in Brenham, Texas. Both churches are well known. The Houston church has over 24,000 members. The one hundred fifty year old Brenham church is the place where Sam Houston was baptized. The Baylor family was also associated with this congregation.

In January 1990, Duane got sick. His illness settled in his throat and his voice was reduced to a raspy squeak. Through the Baylor Medical Clinic in Houston, he had access to the best doctors in the world. Some of these specialists were so well known that they treated famous opera singers and movie stars. All concluded that he was afflicted with an incurable and irreversible condition.

After a year without preaching, he resigned from the church and moved back to Houston. His wife, who had been out of the job market for fifteen years, went to work to help pay the bills. He found a job as a private investigator. His primary responsibility was to study court documents in search of land fraud.

Two years later his crumbling world caved in some more. His business clients dropped him. They feared that he might be called as an expert witness in court, and that his inability to talk clearly would affect his credibility. At about the same time, his insurance company dropped him. Since the specialists gave him no hope of recovery, and all treatment was considered "experimental." He tried to be a writer, but had been

turned down. First, he had no name recognition. Second, he would be unable to speak in the promotion of his work.

At this point, his old Sunday School class asked him to fill in as a teacher. There were about two hundred in the class. He had taught them for six years while on staff. They loved him dearly and wanted to do what they could to encourage him. They found a special mike that he could "wear." This way the mike could be constantly positioned at his lips, even when he turned his head. He loved to teach, but the exertion so inflamed his throat that he was unable to even take a drink for over twenty-four hours. Duane said it was worth it!

On January 17, 1993 he was teaching from Psalm 103. It was a part of the regular Sunday School curriculum which had been set up in 1986. As always, the lesson was recorded for the benefit of those unable to attend. This was the only Sunday School class at First Baptist which did so.

The text includes these wonderful promises: **"He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases; he redeems my life from the pit . . ."** As Duane spoke these words, his voice was immediately, and completely healed. He did not know what to say. His voice was choked with emotion. The class erupted in applause. Listening to the tape is a dramatic and unforgettable experience.

The Scriptures tell of a crippled man who was healed by Peter and John. He was over forty years old, and was lame from his mother's womb. Every day he begged alms at the gate of the Temple which is called "Beautiful" (See Acts 3:1-12; 4:22.) The man's circumstance was so well known that this miracle of healing could not be denied.

So also with the story of Duane Miller. His infirmity was so well know, and so thoroughly documented, that his healing cannot be denied. The "experts" are totally confounded. Today, his throat is perfect. Even the scar tissue has disappeared. He can sing much higher than other men his age. Duane smiles and quotes again from Psalm 103:5: **"He satisfies my desires with good things, so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's."**

Duane did a video interview at Good News Productions, Intl. in Joplin, Missouri on November 29, 1995. At this time he had already had over 10,000 decision for Christ in 1995. A prominent publisher is in the process of publishing his auto-biography, and has also agreed to do a sequel.

"O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23.)

"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: ;and he delighteth in his way" (Ps. 37:23.)

AN UNUSUAL ARTICLE

Today is January 16, 1996. I have just completed a rather lengthy article about Ishmael and Isaac. I do not know why I wrote this article. It was a message burning on my heart. It was something I felt that God wanted me to do, but other than that it makes no sense.

Since this chapter, of this book, is somewhat of a spiritual journal, or diary, I am going to incorporate it here. Hopefully, at some future time it will make more sense.

ISHMAEL AND ISAAC

"Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants" (Gal. 4:24.)

"Allegory" is a Greek word. It comes from "allos," which means "other," and "agoreuo," which means to speak in an assembly. It was a teaching tool used by public speakers. A simple story, which was easy to remember, was used to illustrate a concept which was profound. Webster defines an allegory as a "description of one thing under the image of another." The Galatians were confused about their own relationship with law and grace. For this reason, Paul used an "allegory," to teach them the truth of God.

Ishmael and Isaac were half brothers. They had the same father, but different mothers. There were similar in many ways. Abraham begat both in his old age. God spoke to both mothers and prophesied about the future of their sons. Both were circumcised. Both became great nations. Both lived in the same part of the world. Both helped bury their father. Since both had the same father, it is quite possible that they were similar in appearance. We may also assume that both wore the same type of clothing, ate the same type of food, and had the same life style. If we saw them from a distance we might easily confuse one with the other.

They were, however, quite different. They were not only different, they were radically different. The word "radical" comes from the Latin "radix," which means "root." (This is the basis of our English word "radish," which is a root.) These brothers were radically different. They were as different as black and white, bitter and sweet, night and day.

Paul taught that these men, and their mothers, were allegories (Gal. 4:21-31.) They were like two different covenants, or two different approaches to God. One was carnal, and the other spiritual. One was after the flesh, and the other by promise. One produced bondage, and the other freedom. One was like an organization, and the other like an organism. One was characterized by "dead works," and the other by "service to a Living God" (Heb. 9:14.) One covenant represented Judaism, and the other Christianity.

Judaism and Christianity were also similar in many ways. Both Jews and Christians met each week and studied the Scriptures. Both had nothing to do with pagan idols. Both had high standards of moral conduct. Both emphasized the importance of prayer. Both had elders and deacons. Both were evangelistic. Both baptized by immersion. When seen from a distance, one might easily confuse one with the other.

Nevertheless, Judaism and Christianity were radically different. They could never be combined. To attempt to do so would be like putting new wine in old skins, or new cloth in an old garment. The old covenant, and the new covenant are irreconcilably different. The old covenant was written in stone. It was cold, rigid, inflexible, and without mercy. The new covenant is the opposite of the old. It is filled with warmth, flexibility, emotion, and compassion. It is not written in stone, or pieces of paper, it is written in the mind and heart of believers (Heb. 8:7-10.)

HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

Before considering Hagar, and her son, Ishmael, let us briefly review the promises of God. Among

other things, God promised Abram that he would have a son.

- God made promises to Abram when he lived in Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2.)
- These promises were repeated when Abram lived in Haran (Gen. 12:1-4.)
- Some time later, after Lot was separated from him, the promises were again repeated to Abram (Gen. 13:14-18.)
- After Abram paid tithes to Melchizedek, the promises were repeated yet again (Gen. 15:1-21.)
- Abram believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness (Gen. 15:6.)

Sarai, Abram's wife, apparently did not believe that these promises applied to her. She had been barren all of her life. She did not believe it was possible for her to have a child. Therefore, she encouraged Abram to have a child by Hagar, her Egyptian handmaid. Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael (Gen. 16:1-16.)

It is important to note the carnal nature of this relationship. Nothing about it was spiritual, or supernatural. The original thought, in the mind of Sarai, was carnal. It did not come from God. The relationship that Abram had with Hagar was carnal. The birth of Ishmael was also carnal. Abram, as you know, was not infertile. After the death of Sarah, he married Keturah and had six more children (Gen. 25:1-2.) The Old Covenant, allegorized by Hagar and Ishmael, was known as the **"law of a carnal commandment" (Heb. 7:16.)**

ISHMAEL WAS A "WILD MAN"

After Hagar conceived, the angel of the Lord told her that her son was to be named "Ishmael," because God had heard her affliction (Gen. 16:11.) The name Ishmael means "God hears." The angel further predicted that Ishmael would be a "wild man." The NIV translates it as "wild donkey of a man." The word refers to a beast that was stubborn and difficult to tame. Ishmael would be like this. He would be a continual source of controversy and division:

"And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren" (Gen. 16:12.)

A brief review of Ishmael's life will help to understand his combative nature. For almost fourteen years he had every reason to believe he would inherit the wealth of his father. During this time, he was not only the firstborn son of Abram, he was the only son. He was also much loved by his father. As proof of this, when Abraham was informed that Sarah would have a son, he cried out to God: **"O that Ishmael might live before thee!" (Gen. 17:18.)** Such, however, was not to be.

When Isaac was born, an incredible thing happened. Ishmael, the firstborn and beloved son of Abram, was driven out and disinherited. No wonder he was angry. He must have "cried out" to God for justice, as his mother did many years before. His cries to God would provide another insight into the reason he was called "Ishmael."

This is, of course, an allegory that helps us to understand the nature of law. The very essence of law

is litigious and quarrelsome, just like Ishmael. That which is written in stone never changes. Our understanding, however, does change. Consequently, our understanding of law is in a constant state of flux. Human beings are seldom at the same level of knowledge and understanding. Sometimes we even abandon previous positions about which we once felt confident. This is one reason why the Old Law, written in stone, will always be controversial. Take, for example, the commandment to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Scholars have debated the meaning of these words for over three thousand five hundred years . . . and still do not agree. Legal judgments are quite often appealed, and legal libraries have hundreds of books. The very nature of law is litigious and quarrelsome, just like Ishmael.

Perhaps this is one reason God found fault with the old covenant (Heb. 8:8.) It was a constant source of controversy. It was harsh, like being in jail (Gal. 3:23.) Its commandments and ordinances were "carnal," (Heb. 7:16, 9:10.) It was "weak and beggarly," (Ga. 4:9.) Peter called it a "yoke . . . which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear" (Acts 15:10.) Those who based their relationship with God on the old covenant were like Ishmael. They were always crying out for a legal remedy. They were always ready for an argument or debate. Consequently, they were always divisive, and divided.

Carnal religion is still a source of controversy and division. Those involved in it are constantly complaining and consistently critical . . . just like Ishmael.

SARAH AND ISAAC

Thirteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God appeared again to Abram and renewed His promises. This time the promises were given in association with the covenant of circumcision, and the changing of names. Abram (exalted father) was given the name Abraham (father of multitudes.) Sarai (Jehovah is Prince) was given the name Sarah (princess.)

The very essence of Isaac's birth involved the supernatural. From the human point of view Sarah couldn't have a baby. It had ceased to be with her after the manner of women (Gen. 18:11.) She was "past age" (Heb. 11:11.) She had a dead womb (Rom. 4:19.) She had wanted to have a baby all of her married life, and had failed. The very idea that she could conceive, after menopause, was preposterous. This idea, as you know, did not come from man, it came from God.

The name Isaac means "laughter." Abraham laughed at the idea of his birth (Gen. 17:17,) and so did Sarah (Gen. 18:12,) Isaac also must have laughed when he inherited everything Ishmael had hoped for. The fact of Isaac's inheritance is explicitly stated in Scripture. When Abraham died, the Bible plainly states that Isaac received everything he had (Gen. 25:5.) The son of the bondwoman was not an heir with the son of the freewoman (Gal. 4:30.) This, as you know, is like Christianity. Our inheritance is like that of Isaac. It is both miraculous, and undeserved.

While Ishmael was arguing and complaining, Isaac was laughing. This is indeed a poignant allegory of the two covenants.

ISAAC TRANSCENDED LAW

It needs to be remembered that although Abram lived long before Moses, he still obeyed laws. God said: **"Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes,**

and my laws" (Gen. 26:5.) The Law of Moses, as you know, came four hundred and thirty years later (Gal. 3:17.)

The birth of Isaac, however, transcended law. There had never been a birth like his. The unique nature of his existence placed him outside the jurisdiction of the law of nature, the law of the Patriarchs, and the Law of Moses. There was no precedent for a legal judgment. The nature of Isaac was spiritual. It transcended the laws of earth.

In recent years our minds have been stretched by travel in outer space. Astronauts do not get speeding tickets. They operate outside the jurisdiction of earth. They travel in the heavens. Objects that are dropped on earth fall. Objects "dropped" in space merely float. Those "in the heavens" are operating in a different environment. They are beyond the limiting affects of the earth and its atmosphere. Isaac was like this. He too, was outside the realm of earthly law. No wonder he was so happy. Neither Ishmael, nor anyone else, could condemn, or disinherit him. He is like a beautiful allegory of Christianity. Nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:37-39.) Paul stated it succinctly: **"If ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18.)** No wonder Christians are so happy!

APPLICATION OF THIS TRUTH BY THE APOSTLES

Abram and Sarai were so anxious to expedite the promises that they took matters into their own hands. They didn't "wait" upon the Lord, but ran ahead of Him. They quit trying to "transform" the world, and became "conformed" to it. Their approach was "carnal," not "spiritual." It seemed to work. It produced visible results, but it did not please God.

Paul dealt with the same problem in his day. Some lost sight of the spiritual nature of Christianity and became carnal. They "marketed" Jesus like a huckster. In fact, this is precisely what Paul accused them of. He wrote: **"We are not as many, which corrupt the word of God . . ." (II Cor. 2:17.)** He made a sharp distinction between his ministry and theirs. The word translated "corrupt" is "kapeleuo." It refers to a petty retailer, or huckster. They were hucksters, but Paul was not. Paul's approach to Christianity was spiritual. Hucksters will do almost anything to make a sale. Some preachers would do almost anything to "make" the church grow. Paul wouldn't!

The hucksters saw things from a human point of view. Paul didn't (II Cor. 5:16.) Since they had fleshly minds, they depended heavily upon fleshly letters, but Paul didn't (II Cor. 3:1.) They were consistently trying to impress men, but Paul wouldn't. He wrote to the Galatians that if he tried to please men, he would not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10.) Paul accused them of **"walking in craftiness" and "handling the word of God deceitfully" (II Cor. 4:2.)** Paul's preaching was without deceit, uncleanness, or guile (I Thess. 2:3.)

God does not think the way men think. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Is. 55:8-9.) In His infinite wisdom, God did not choose many wise men after the flesh. He deliberately overlooked those who were mighty, and noble. He chose those whom the world considered foolish, that He might put to shame the wise. He chose the "weak" to confound the "mighty." He chose that which was "base" and "despised." One reason He did so, was that no flesh would be able to glory in His presence (I Cor. 1:24-31.)

The original twelve apostles, as you know, were without human credentials. They had no money, power, or prestige. Many modern churches would consider them only qualified to do manual labor. God, however, saw them as foundational to the future of a new kind of kingdom. Paul was an exception. He had an excellent education, and many other fleshly things about which to glory. Instead of helping him, however, his human credentials were a hindrance. He wrote to the Philippians, **"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7.)** Paul abandoned his earthly achievements like garbage that he might know Christ and the power of His resurrection.

Note his utter dependence upon the power of God:

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (II Cor. 2:1-5.)

In his second letter he would make the same confession with these words:

"Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God . . ." (II Cor.3:5.)

Christianity, like Isaac, is utterly dependent upon God. There was no human law to which Isaac could appeal that he might receive the inheritance of his father. Human judges, and human lawyers, would not, and could not understand what happened.

AN INSTITUTION OR AN ORGANISM

The Old Covenant created an institution. It was, of course, a divine institution, created by God Himself. God did not do so, however, to glorify institutional religion. It was a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith! (Gal. 3:24)

Note the fleshly nature of Old Covenant religion. The qualifications for the high priest, for example, were fleshly qualifications. First, he had to come from the Tribe of Levi, and the family of Aaron. His spiritual depth, or maturity, was not a factor. Further, he could not have any "physical" blemish. Some of these "blemishes" are listed in Leviticus.

"For whatsoever man he be that hath a blemish, he shall not approach: a blind man, or a lame, or he that hath a flat nose, or any thing superfluous. Or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, or crookbacked, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eyes, or be scurvy, or scabbed, or hath his stones broken; NO MAN THAT HATH A BLEMISH OF THE SEED OF AARON THE PRIEST SHALL COME NIGH TO OFFER

THE OFFERINGS OF THE LORD MADE BY FIRE: HE THAT HATH A BLEMISH; HE SHALL NOT COME NIGH TO OFFER THE BREAD OF HIS GOD" (Lev. 21:18-21.)

If a man met these physical qualifications, he could serve as high priest, even if he was spiritually corrupt. Caiaphas and Annas proved this in the time of Christ. Both were so spiritually debauched that they played an active role in the crucifixion of Christ. Yet, both served in the office of high priest. Even though their hearts were far from God, the Lord honored the office in which they served. Take, for example, the words of Caiaphas in John 11:50. In this passage Caiaphas said that **"it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."**

John, the inspired apostle who recorded these words, then explained:

"And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:51-52.)

Institutional religion is still the same. Individuals with carnal credentials can serve in the institution, regardless of the condition of their heart.

Christianity, by contrast, is described in Scripture as a "body." It is not an "organization," it is an "organism." Every member of the body must be spiritually alive in order to function. To be "severed from Christ," is to no longer be a part of the body. It is to "fall from grace" (Gal. 5:4.)

Jesus used a similar analogy on the night before Calvary. He said:

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. 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" (John 15:5-6.)

Man cannot produce "fruit." Only God can do that! Human laboratories can produce something that looks like fruit, and tastes like fruit, but it is not fruit. True fruit, produced by God, has life within it. Seeds from that fruit will grow if they are properly planted.

As in the case of Ishmael and Isaac, it is sometimes difficult to tell the carnal from the spiritual. Ananias and Sapphira, for example, looked like true Christians, but they were not. They were not joined to Christ, and henceforth could not produce fruit. In an institutional church they would never have been discovered. Outwardly, they appeared spiritual. Inwardly, however, their hearts were far from God. Consequently, they were condemned. Dead branches do not belong on a living tree.

"ESTABLISHING CHURCHES" OR "MAKING DISCIPLES"

There is a constant temptation for modern disciples to be like Ishmael. For example, many boast of going out to "establish churches." At the risk of sounding technical, Jesus did not command His disciples to "establish churches." He told them to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:18-20.) While these two concepts may seem similar, they are as different as Ishmael and Isaac. Man can make a carnal institution just as Abram could father a fleshly child. Only God, however, could bring Isaac into the world. In similar fashion, only Christ can create the living, spiritual Body, which is His Church. (As a point of interest, the Scriptures never refer to "members" of the "church," only "members" of the "body.")

Note these Scriptures. Jesus promised that He would build His church (Matt. 16:18.) Once created, He added to it those who were being saved (Acts 2:47.) It is explicitly stated that Jesus is the Head of His Body (Col. 1:18,) and that He is the Head of all things pertaining to the church (Eph. 1:22.) He is the one who sets people in positions of leadership in His Body, which is His church (I Cor. 12:28.) The church of Jesus Christ is not an organization, it is a living organism. Man can head up an organization, but only Jesus is the Head of His Church.

As in the case of Abram and Sarai, it is easy to run ahead of God. There is a perennial temptation to take matters into our own hands and make something happen. If we are paid Christian workers, the pressure to produce is even greater. Consequently, we need to be continually reminded about the spiritual nature of Christianity. The church of Jesus Christ is a spiritual house, built of living stones (I Pet. 2:5.) We are cautioned to take heed how we build on Christ (I Cor. 3:10.) Every man's work will be tried by fire to see if it is genuine (I Cor. 3:13.) In the final analysis, only God can give life. Only God can add members to His Body. One man can plant the seed, and another can water it, but only God can give the increase (I Cor. 3:7.)

Unconverted people can found organizations, and erect physical buildings. In fact, the largest and most ornate Temple to Jehovah was built by Herod the Great. This was the same cruel despot who tried to kill the baby Jesus. Herod began the temple in 19 B.C. and it was not completed until A.D. 64. Josephus described its grandeur in the most eloquent terms. Its polished marble reflected the sun with such brilliance that it was difficult to tell one from the other. The disciples came to Jesus "to show Him the buildings of the temple" (Matt. 24:1.) Jesus was not impressed. As a matter of fact, He warned them that the day was coming when that temple would be destroyed. He said: **"There shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down."**

The early Christians, by contrast, had nothing physical about which to boast. Like the salt of the earth they silently penetrated and preserved the ancient world. Like leaven hidden in three measures of meal, they relentlessly did their work until the whole was leavened. On December 29, 1967, speaking at the Hartford Forum, the late W. Carl Ketcherside described the spiritual work of the early church with these words:

"No earthly power could halt their triumphant processional. They invaded every part of the earth and penetrated every stratum of society. Eventually they topped the tyrannical Caesars from their thrones and the cross which had been a badge of shame became the symbol of their conquest.

The heart pulsates more rapidly as one contemplates their fearless exploits on the frontiers of life, the eye grows moist and the vision becomes misty when one reads of the way in which they faced death. And admiration deepens and wonderment increases when it is

realized that their magnificent accomplishments were achieved without any of the machinery deemed essential to promote and procure our own feeble successes.

The primitive liberation army had no buildings of its own. There were no cathedrals, no edifices, no suburban chapels with well-manicured lawns, stained-glass windows, or cushioned pews. They operated from the small homes of the members, from third-story walk-up halls, from caves and catacombs, and from dens in the earth.

They had no lighted signboards flashing forth their address, no printing presses and no newspapers. They could not distribute scripture portions, or pass out copies of the new testament. They could not give chapter and verse. There were no journals or tracts, no inspirational volumes, no religious libraries, no duplicated lesson sheets.

There were no television sets, no radio stations and no telephones with which to correlate arrangements. There were no cars, no buses, no trains, and no planes to link together the far-flung outposts of the empire.

They had no bank accounts, no budgets, no endowments, no investments, no interest-bearing bonds or annuities. They established no institutions, chartered no organizations, and created no fraternal orders. They had no schools or colleges to train and polish their vanguard, no courses in hermeneutics or homiletics, no missionary societies to send them forth and sustain them, no conventions to draft resolutions to the Caesars or their procurators, no board of church extension, no council of agencies.

There were no promotional secretaries, no crusade directors, no headquarters on earth. They sought no prestige by parading before the world the politicians, professionals or actors within their number. There was no appeal to the pagan public through sensationalism, sophistication or fabrication . . . "

Comparing the early church with our own, someone quipped: "If they did what they did with what they had, think what we could do with what we have, if we had what they had."

As you know, the early church was seduced away from the simplicity that is in Christ. Eventually they abandoned their spiritual emphasis and became an institution with great wealth and property. They had gold, silver, and precious stones in abundance. They did business with the kings of the earth. Such opulence and wealth, however, were not assets. John, in the book of Revelation, described this kind of church as the great whore.

PERSECUTION

"But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now" (Gal. 4:29.)

It is interesting to note that just as Ishmael tried to destroy Isaac, institutional religion sought to perpetuate its power by persecution. This was true in Old Testament times, as well as in the days of Christ and

His apostles. Jesus said that the wise men and prophets were consistently persecuted by the religious leaders of their day.

"Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Baracharias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar (Matt. 23:34-36.)

This was also true in the time of Jesus. He sent out His disciples like sheep in the midst of wolves. He warned that those who put them to death would think they were doing God service (John 16:2.) Jesus, as you know, was not persecuted by political leaders like Pilate and Herod. He was persecuted by the proponents of institutional religion. Pilate wanted to let him go, but the Jews answered: **"We have a law, and by our law He ought to die" (John 19:7.)**

This was also true throughout the Apostolic Age. Stephen was not stoned by political leaders, but religious ones. Saul, the persecutor, became Paul the persecuted. As such, he understood the thinking of those who tried to kill him. He reminded Timothy of the persecution and afflictions he received in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, and then declared: **"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (II Tim. 3:12.)** Eventually, the great whore was drunk with the blood of the saints (Rev. 17:6.)

BY THEIR FRUITS YE SHALL KNOW THEM

Jesus warned of religious leaders who were like wolves in sheep's clothing. Without His guidance, it would be difficult to tell the good leaders from the bad. Jesus, however, made it simple. He taught that the true nature of religious teachers is not determined by how they look, or what they say. It is discerned by what they produce. Jesus said you would know them by their fruits.

Ishmael and Isaac may have looked alike, but they produced different fruit. Ishmael produced division. God predicted that his hand would be against every man, and every man's hand would be against him (Gen. 16:12.) The NIV confirms this prophecy by stating that the descendants of Ishmael **"lived in hostility toward all their brothers" (Gen. 25:18.)** The descendants of Isaac had a different future. God promised that wherever they went, they would be a blessing. Whoever blessed them would be blessed, and whoever cursed them would be cursed. Eventually, though Isaac, all the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3.)

It is sometimes difficult to tell the nature of a tree by its leaves, or the grain of its wood. It is easy, however, to tell a tree by its fruit. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles. In this regard it is easy to tell Ishmael from Isaac. One produced controversy and division, while the other produced a blessing.

Paul wrote that the works of the flesh were "manifest," or "obvious." They included such things as **"hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings . . ." (Gal. 5:20-21.)** God does not create bitter envying and jealousy. **"This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and**

every evil work" (Ja. 3:14-16.)

Christian work, by contrast, is known by: **"love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance:"** (Gal. 5:22-23.) **"The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace"** (Ja. 4:17-18.)

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Our relationship with God is ultimately and inevitably personal. **"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son . . . "** (Ez. 18:20.) When we stand before God, we will all be judged as individuals.

The church at Thyatira, for example, was a bad church. They allowed the woman, Jezebel, to teach and to seduce the servants of God to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols (Rev. 2:20.) Not everyone at Thyatira, however, was condemned. They were all judged as individuals. The Lord said: **"And unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden, but that which ye have already hold fast till I come"** (Rev. 2:24-25.)

It doesn't matter what anyone else does, or does not do. You can be saved and have a wonderful relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord. You can lay up treasures in heaven and enjoy the prospects of eternal reward. Your work, however, will be more spiritually productive and effective, if you are like Isaac instead of Ishmael!

Here is another thought to consider:

FOLLOWERS

"Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (I Cor. 11:1.)

The Bible word translated as "followers" is "mimetes," from which we get our English word "mimic." Some versions translate the word as "imitators." Paul used the same word in I Cor. 4:16. In this passage, he considered himself as their spiritual father, and encouraged them to "imitate him" or be his "followers."

What did Paul mean by these words? He had a unique calling as an apostle to the gentiles. Are we to imitate this? Paul was not married. Are we to imitate this? Paul was inspired to write books of the Bible. Are we to imitate this?

Please consider! Paul wanted us to follow him, as he followed Christ. How did Paul follow Christ? The answer is obvious, he followed Him directly. In this regard there can be no misunderstanding. Paul made it crystal clear that He did not have a "second hand" relationship with Christ. He wrote to the Galatians: **"But I certify you brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ"** (Gal. 1:11-12.) The focus of Paul's life and ministry was always to please God, and not man. In fact, he said that if he tried to please men, he would not be a servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10.) His relationship with Jesus did not come through Peter, James, or John. It did not come through any man. Paul had a personal and direct

relationship with Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted all of to have. The ultimate goal of every believer is to be **"followers of God as dear children"** (Eph. 5:1.)

It has been correctly stated that God has no grandchildren. Every child of God must have a personal and direct relationship with their Heavenly Father. Once this is understood, it is possible to do everything "as to the Lord." Please consider these Scriptures:

- **"Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men . . ." (Col. 3:21-23.)**

- **"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22.)**

- **"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ. Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men" (Eph. 6:5-7.)**

- **"But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts" (I Thess. 2:4.)**

- **Etc.**

Everyone is familiar with using a pattern. If you are cutting boards according to a pattern, it is important that you always go back to the original pattern as a guide. No matter how careful you try to be, each copy of the original is slightly different. The same principle applies to Christianity. Jesus is our "Original Pattern," and ultimate example. Paul endeavored to pattern his life after Jesus. The Corinthians were to do the same, and so are we.

Whatever we do, in word or deed, we are to do it "as to the Lord, and not unto men." The Jewish leaders, for example, commanded the apostles not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus. Peter, and the other apostles, correctly responded: **"We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29.)** So should we!