

JOY

The word "joy" is found 165 times in the King James Bible. Under the heading of "joy," Young's Analytical Concordance lists 9 different Hebrew words and 3 different Greek words. This basic "family" of words can be easily expanded by including joyous, joyful, joyfulness, etc.

Our reflections on this word can be greatly simplified by remembering that "joy" is considered in Scripture as "fruit of the Spirit." **"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."** (Gal. 5:22-23.)

Note that the word "fruit" is singular. The manifestations of the Spirit are so cohesive that they are considered as one.

The word "joy" in this passage is the Greek word "chara." It refers to a joy and a delight that come from God. Man can make artificial fruit, but true fruit can only come from God. When you put an artificial apple in the ground it will be destroyed. When you put a real apple in the ground it will grow.

Paul wrote four letters from prison that are included in our Bible (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) All of these letters reflect his joy in the Lord. The Philippian letter, in particular, is known as a letter of rejoicing. The noun "chara" is found five times in this letter (1:4, 25; 2:2, 29; 4:1) and the verb "charein" is found eleven times (1:18,18; 2:17,17, 18,18, 28; 3:1; 4:4, 4, 10)

JOY is a fruit of the SPIRIT! It can never be experienced in the flesh. Having said this, let us reflect upon Ishmael, and Isaac.

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 toppled 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 grow moist and the vision become 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!

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. For 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 imperfect; 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 marshaled 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)

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.

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 guestchamber, 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 religion of 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's 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 mindboggling 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 mold, into the image of Christ, glowing with glory and divine vitality. It is a glorious doctrine which is rarely presented to nonChristians: 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 "dynamis." 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."

LED BY THE SPIRIT

For many years I have reflected upon "discipleship". It seemed that Jesus came from heaven to select a small group of disciples and pour His life into them. I assumed that this was a pattern for His Apostles, as well as for me. I knew that some of the biggest churches in the world were built upon small discipleship groups. Yet, for some reason, I did not feel comfortable with any model with which I was familiar.

As I studied the book of Acts I was unable to find small discipleship groups established by Peter and the other Apostles. The direction of my study was producing more questions than answers.

A college professor in physics has offered some salient advice in problem solving. "If your reasoning," he said, "makes things more complicated, you are going in the wrong direction."

In the last few years I have changed the direction of my thinking. Now, discipleship seems so simple that it is almost frightening. I am now convinced that the concept which Jesus gave to His Apostles is so rudimentary and uncomplicated that it can be replicated in any life and any society.

Jesus did not give us a map and expect us to find our own way. He came to be our Guide, and promised that He would never leave us or forsake us.

Here are a few thoughts for your prayerful consideration.

IN THE GOSPELS

- In the Gr. Commission of Matthew's Gospel there is only one imperative. It is to "make disciples." The Greek word is "mathateusate," which is the 2nd pers. pl. aor. 1, imper. act. of "matheuo." Going, baptizing, and teaching, may have the force of commands, but they are written as participles.
- The Disciples were to teach their students to observe all of the things which Jesus commanded them. They were to replicate His life and follow His example. He promised to be with them in this endeavor until the end of the world.
- The primary command of Jesus to His disciples was "Follow Me!" The verb "to follow" occurs approximately 80 times in the Gospels and almost exclusively describes the relationship between Jesus and His companions. Vine states: "It is used 77 times in the Gospels, of following Christ, and only once otherwise, Mk. 14:13."
- 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 Dict. of N.T. 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, who were commanded to "make disciples", 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 (only six times in the Gospels, and once in Acts).
- The Disciples of Jesus had been raised to observe rituals. With Jesus they maintained a relationship. Jesus seemed to avoid rituals. When He healed the blind, for example, He did it differently every time. Once He spat in the blind man's eyes, another time He spat on the ground, another time He did not spit at all.
- In the absence of rituals the Disciples learned spontaneity and trust. Upon one occasion Jesus sent them forth with no provisions. At another time He promised them that without human planning God would give them special words and wisdom. They came to trust and depend upon Jesus for guidance.

- Jesus led His Disciples many places where they would never have gone without Him. He led them into Gentile territory, through Samaria, to Judea to raise Lazarus, and to Jerusalem where He was to suffer and die. Discipleship meant following Jesus regardless of the cost.
- In the Upper Room, Jesus shocked His Disciples by announcing that He was going where they could not follow. He promised, however, that He would not leave them as orphans. He would return and continue to guide them. In the flesh He could only be one place at a time. As a Spirit He could be with all His Disciples simultaneously.
- After His resurrection He warned the Disciples not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father. They were not to proceed on their own. They were basically to continue the same type of ministry which they had already been involved in for the past three years. Though He was ascending into heaven, they would not be abandoned. His Holy Spirit would come to provide them with guidance and power (Acts 1:4-8).

IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

- The Gospels only tell what Jesus "began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1) The book of Acts records what Jesus continued "to do and teach" by means of His Holy Spirit. Guidance from heaven is evident in virtually every chapter. The Disciples began "to follow" Jesus during His earthly ministry. Now they continued "to follow" the leading of His Spirit.
- Jesus called His Disciples to be "fishers of men" after a miraculous catch of fish. Against human strategy and wisdom, Jesus commanded them to launch out into the deep. His guidance enabled them to catch many fish. Their boats were filled to overflowing. The same type of supernatural guidance would also enable them to catch men.
- The same Spirit that guided Paul to the big cities, guided Philip to leave a big city (see acts 8:) The same Spirit that led Paul to teach three years in Ephesus, caught away Philip from the Ethiopian eunuch so that he could not teach him. The same Spirit that delivered Peter from prison allowed James to be beheaded in prison (Acts 12:). The Holy Spirit guided different men to do different things, at different times. We are to follow His leading, even when we do not understand it.
- It was the Holy Spirit that separated Barnabas and Saul to their work (Acts 13:) It was the Holy Spirit that pointed out Timothy to Paul (Acts 16: and I Tim. 1:18). It was the Holy Spirit that prevented Paul from entering Asia and Bithynia, and ultimately led him to Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10).
- Guidance in the book of Acts came in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes it was from a passage of Scripture (Acts 4:25-26). Sometimes it was by common sense (Acts 6:2). By angels (Acts 8:26). By circumstances (Acts 9:23-26). By direct revelation or visions (Acts 10:10-16). By the urging of friends (Acts 19:31). In each instance, however, it is safe to say that our Sovereign God was in control.

IN THE EPISTLES

- The Apostles not only depended upon guidance from God, they taught their converts to do the same. Jesus

taught them: **"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27.)** At the same time He promised: **"A stranger they will not follow" (vs. 5.)** As Jesus commanded in the Gr. Commission, they continued to teach their disciples what He had taught them.

- Paul wrote to the Romans: **"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14.)** This guidance was not just for the Apostles, but for all of God's children.
- To the Corinthians: **"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 judged" (I Cor. 2:14.)**
- To the Philippians: **"If in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you" (Phi. 3:15.)** Apparently, God would help the Philippians with some sort of special revelation and understanding.
- To the Colossians: **"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (Col. 3:15.)** The word "rule" is "brabeuo" which means to act as an umpire. It seems that when a child of God is doing something God does not want them to do, God takes away their peace.
- To the Thessalonians: **"When ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh in you that believe" (I Thess. 2:13.)** Somehow, God's word somehow "works" in the believer.
- While the Holy Spirit has gifted some as teachers, God teaches some things to His children directly: **"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.)**
- Guidance can come from the Scriptures when the word of God has "free course" in our lives: **"Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you" (II Thess. 3:1.)**
- John wrote: **"But ye have an unction from the Holy one, and ye know all things" (I John 2:20).** **"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things . . ." (I John 2:27).**

THE NECESSITY OF THE NEW BIRTH

- The Kingdom of God does not come with observation. It is within us (Lk. 17:20-21). You have to be "born again" in order to see it (John 3:3).
- The Greek noun "poema" (the basis of our English word "poem") occurs but two times in the Scriptures. It is used in Rom. 1:20 to refer to the physical universe which God created. It is used in Eph. 2:10 to refer to the spiritual universe which God created.

- God is not the Author of confusion, but of peace (I Cor. 14:33). The physical creation is a "universe" and not a "multiverse". Our universe reflects harmony and design. It is like a poem. The spiritual workmanship of God also reflects harmony and design. It is also like a poem.
- Unregenerate man is in rebellion against God. His **"heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9)**. His conduct is predictable. Moses observed that Israel rebelled during his life, and would be worse after his death (Deut. 31:27). He was right.
- Regenerate man is not rebellious. Ezekiel predicted: **"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 a 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)**.
- Note that the letters to Christians are filled with optimism that: **"He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6)**. See also I Cor. 1:8; Col. 1:22; I Thess. 3:13; 5:9; 5:23-24; II Thess. 3:3-4; Gal 5:10; Phil. 3:3; etc.
- Even though regenerate man struggles with the remnant of his sinful nature (Rom. 7:) the outcome is predictable so that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1). He that is within us is greater than he that is in the world.

LEARNING FROM THE BEASTS

- Job said: **"But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee" (Job 12:7)**. There are lessons which we can learn from the lower creatures of earth which can be extrapolated into the world of spiritual things.
- Salmon are spawned in fresh water, spend their lives in salt water, and somehow instinctively are guided to the place of their birth that they may lay eggs and die. They overcome incredible obstacles, swim upstream and even jump waterfalls.
- Scientists have experimented with many types of birds (such as the albatross and homing pigeons). They have deliberately tried to get them lost. Yet, somehow these creatures are guided over hundreds and even thousands of miles to the place where they began.
- Many creatures migrate on land, in the sea, and also in the heavens. Some birds travel 22,000 miles from the Arctic, to Antarctica each year without getting lost. If God can guide such inferior beings there is little doubt that He can also guide us.
- Ants are among the most numerous creatures on earth. There are 8,800 known species of ants and someone has estimated that they number ten million billion. This would far exceed the number of all mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians combined. Solomon said: **"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)**.

- It is not necessary to organize an ant hill. God has already taken care of that. Is it possible that God is also guiding, and orchestrating, the members of His Body upon the earth?
- We are "new creations" in Christ Jesus. Old things are passed away, and all things are new. We have gone through a metamorphosis so that our "natural" desires have been replaced by the presence of His Spirit. The caterpillar crawls along munching leaves. The butterfly soars in the heavens and sips nectar. Christians have gone through a metamorphosis.

SOME OBVIOUS EXAMPLES

- Jesus is the Head of His Body the Church. By One Spirit we were all baptized into that One Body (I Cor.12:13). The various members of His Body are compared to a foot, hand, eye, or ear, etc. It is unthinkable that the Head of the Body would not have communication with, and control over, the members of the Body. As members of His Body, we should take directions from the Head rather than imitate one another.
- Jesus is the Captain of our salvation. He has enrolled us as His soldiers. It is unthinkable that our Commander in Chief cannot contact and supply His troops. One reason the recent Gulf War was ended so quickly is that Sadaam Hussein lost the ability to communicate with and supply his troops. This will never happen to the Sovereign of the Universe!
- Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He knows His sheep by name. He calls them, and they know His voice. They somehow intuitively know not to follow strangers. It is unthinkable that the Good Shepherd cannot guide and direct His sheep.
- God is the Father of His family. His children have received His "seed", and are destined to display His nature. Jesus taught us to ask our Father for whatever we need, and promised that He would hear and respond. We know that the sons of God are led by the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:14).
- There are many other examples in Scripture: husband - wife, King - subject, Master - slave, Vine - branches, etc. Each of these examples pre-supposes a relationship which is constant and vital. It is unthinkable that Jesus cannot communicate with, guide, and supply His people.
- In James 1: God has promised wisdom to those who ask in faith. The first requisite to receive this wisdom is to lack it. We must come to God in utter humility and seek the treasure of His divine wisdom and understand. Then we must ask in faith, nothing doubting. Those who doubt will not receive anything from the Lord.

THE NECESSITY OF DILIGENCE

- The Scriptures admonish us to walk "circumspectly". This literally means "like an acrobat". Lazy and slothful people are in danger of falling.
- Other Scriptural illustrations and analogies emphasize the need for diligence. For example: We are like athletes, soldiers, pilgrims, stewards, sheep in the midst of wolves, etc.

- We need to be diligent to test and confirm whatever guidance we receive for there are many false prophets which have gone out into the world. The devil is a deceiver who transforms himself into an angel of light.
- We must be careful to maintain a conscience which is sensitive to His leading. Anything which we cannot do with confidence, we cannot do, for: **"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).**
- The use of our spiritual faculties or "senses," will help us develop the ability to discern good and evil (Heb. 5:14.)
- We are not to be like the horse and the mule which have no understanding, but we are to be so sensitive to the leading of God that He can guide us with His eye (Ps. 32:8.)

WHAT THE FATHER IS DOING

- Jesus said: **"The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do; for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise" (John 5:19.)** Jesus did not have His own agenda, He came to do the will of God. His knowledge of what God was doing, enabled Him to participate in it.
- God is doing some great things today. We have witnessed the collapse of atheistic communism in the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe. These countries are so open to the Gospel that Bibles and preachers are even welcome in their public schools.
- Revival has also broken out in China. Some have estimated that there may be more evangelical Christians in China than in any other country on earth.
- God is also opening other great doors of evangelism and opportunity all over the world.
- This is not a time to establish our own program and agenda. It is a time to prayerfully seek guidance from God. The apostles toiled all night long and caught no fish. With a little guidance they had great success.

WHAT ABOUT HIM?

- When Jesus told Peter how he was going to die, Peter beckoned to John and said: **"Lord, and what shall this man do?" (John 21:21)** Jesus told Peter that it was none of his business. Each of us is only responsible for following the leading of God in our own lives.
- Scripture warns us about measuring ourselves by ourselves, and comparing ourselves among ourselves (II Cor. 10:12.) What someone else does, or does not do, is not our primary concern. To their own master they will stand or fall. Our primary responsibility is to discover and follow the leading of God in our own lives.
- It is a common thing for Christians to imitate each other. This is especially true of young preachers emulating the lives of older preachers who are considered to be successful. While God "may" be leading in such an endeavor, it is important to remember that he may be a hand in the Body and you may be a foot. Regardless of what anyone else does, or does not do, we need to follow the leading of God in our own lives.

- It is altogether possible that God has sent us some gifted teacher, or "angel unaware" to change the direction of our lives. When we do change, however, it is important that we do so to please God and not men. If we try to please men we cannot be servants of Christ (Gal. 1:10.)

- Jeremiah said: **"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.) Solomon said: **"Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all of thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths"** (Prov. 3:5-6.)

He does not lead 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's enough to bear.
And when tomorrow comes.
His grace is always there.
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.
(author unknown)

Lord! Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil! As John, the beloved disciple wrote: **"These things write we unto you, that your joy may be full"** (I John 1:4.)

Boyce Mouton