



THE BOOK OF
FIRST

PETER

E

BOOK

PUBLICATION

by Given O. Blakely

LESSON #1

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

TEXT

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1)

INTRODUCTION

This book will present several unique views of life in Christ Jesus. Among the subjects presented from a different perspective are, **1-** The status of the saints (1:2), **2-**The new birth (1:3), **3-** Our inheritance (1:3-4), **4-**The preserving of the saints (1:5), **5-**The trial of faith (1:7), **6-**The Prophets announcement of salvation (1:10-11), **7-**Domestic responsibilities (3:1-7), **8-**Baptism (3:21-22), **9-**Elders (5:1-4), and **10-**The resistance of the devil (5:8-9). There is a freshness to this letter that only can come through the power of the Holy Spirit. It challenges our thinking, expanding our understanding of key elements in the life of faith. We will sense a profound spiritual concern throughout the Epistle. It has the tone of a father speaking with his children. While not unique to the writings of Peter, this is a most significant thing. Like all Scripture, it is not the mere conveyance of information, but contains words whereby spiritual life is nurtured and reinforced. Through Peter, the Holy Spirit pleads with those in Christ Jesus, urging them to a deeper involvement with Christ, a more profound faith, and more hearty effort in the good fight of faith. It is a call upward, into the heavenly realm, where faith and hope are strengthened, making us superior to the enemies of our soul. This Epistle will confirm the magnitude of our salvation, and help us put to death stilted and small-minded views of what has taken place in our reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

INTRODUCTION TO PETER

“Peter . . . ” ^(KJV) Anyone familiar with the Word of God has some acquaintance with Peter. He is one of the premier figures in The Gospel of Christ. He was not born with the name “Peter,” which was given to him by Jesus. His father, who was named Jonah (Jonas in the KJV), had named him Simon. He is first referred to as “Simon Barjona,” or Simon the son of Jonah (Matt 16:17). He was brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, who informed him, “We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ” (John 1:40). It was at that time, before he became one of Christ’s disciples, that Jesus renamed him. “And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone” (John 1:42). After Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus said to Him, “And I say also unto thee, **That thou art Peter**, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). The “rock” upon which Christ would build His church was the confession of Peter, the very first man to make that insightful acknowledgment. Prior to him, only demons said that of Jesus (Lk 4:41). That rock (that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God”) was like a large ledge of rock upon which a foundation and structure could be placed.

Peter was a “*rock*” in the sense of having preeminence among men, stable and solid in the faith—traits religious sophists refuse to ascribe to him. Both “*Cephas*” and “*Peter*” mean “*rock*.” “*Cephas*” is an Aramaic equivalent of the Greek name “*Peter*.” Both are surnames, or names that were added. Such names were given to depict either the character or trade of the one so named. In Peter’s case, the name defined his character. Although men have derided Peter as being unstable and always speaking out of turn, Jesus identified him as a “*rock*.” Those who ridicule Peter should be ashamed that they have spoken in such contradiction of Jesus.

There are only two men in Scripture that Satan is said to have wanted to put to the test. The first is the well-known Job (Job 1:9-10; 2:4-5). The other is Peter. While no one told Job of Satan’s desire, Jesus did tell Peter of the old serpent’s yearning. “*Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren*” (Lk 22:31-32). The grievous trial that Peter endured erupted in his three-time denial of Jesus on the night of His betrayal (Matt 26:69-74). Settle it in your mind that it was no ordinary man who denied Jesus three times. It was a man who was being more sorely tested than any of the other Apostles. He did recover from this occasion, according to the prayer of Jesus for him. The desire of Satan to sift Peter is itself a commentary on the man. It shows how Satan regarded him—as he did Job of old. The trouble Job endured was due to Satan’s assault, not a weakness of character. Likewise, the denial of Peter was also the result of a fierce and unimaginable attack by Satan. Both men recovered, and are honored.

Peter is referred to as “*the first*” among the Apostles, which is a most remarkable distinction. “*Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter*” (Matt 10:2). He and his brother Andrew were the very first Jesus called to His side to be special disciples. “*And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.”*” Their response was immediate, indicating the tenderness of their hearts. “*They immediately left their nets and followed Him*” (Matt 4:18-19). Peter is mentioned no less than 94 times in the Gospels, as compared to John (30 times) and James (24 times).

I have labored to show how sharply the Spirit’s representation of Peter differs from that of would-be commentators. Before we can appreciate the writings of this unique man, we must first behold him as Jesus did. His failings, however great they may seem, are nothing to compare with the shortcomings of those who have chosen to criticize him.

PETER, AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST

“*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ . . .*”^{KJV}. In every list of the Apostles, Peter is mentioned first—there is no exception (Matt 10:2-4; Mk 3:14-19; Lk 6:13-16; Acts 1:13). Peter and his brother Andrew were the first called to be disciples (Matt 4:18-19). Luke provides an additional detail of this calling. When our Lord first began His ministry, He chose to teach out of Simon Peter’s boat, afterward granting him a miraculous catch of fish (Lk 5:1-9). Peter saw the resurrected Christ before the twelve together (1 Cor 15:5). He was the one who was used to instigate the choosing of a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15ff). He was the first to preach the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit to the Jews (Acts 2:14ff). Peter was also the first to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10:5-48). He was so prominent, that some in Corinth chose to call themselves after his name, which was wrong (1 Cor 1:12). Paul affirms that “*the Gospel for the circumcised*” (the Jews), was committed “*to Peter*,” stating that God “*worked effectively*” in him (Gal 2:8-9).

In spite of these distinctions, Peter does not identify himself as the “*first*” Apostle, or as a “*pillar*” in the church (Gal 2:9). He refers to himself as “*AN Apostle of Jesus Christ*.” He seems to sense the grandeur of such a call, realizing it was owing to the grace of God, and not to personal merit. It is true that Paul once rebuked Peter for separating himself from the Gentiles because of

certain Jewish brethren (Gal 1:11-14). Yet, such rebuke was not a consistent requirement, and is the only such reproof of him on record following Christ's ascension. Later, in his second Epistle, Peter refers to Paul as "*our beloved brother,*" acknowledging that wisdom had been "*given unto him*" (2 Pet 3:15-16). It is certainly in order for God's servants to refer to themselves humbly, yet in recognition of where God has placed them. Like Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, and the other Apostles, Peter did not "*think of himself more highly than he ought to think*" (Rom 12:3). Yet, neither did he abandon his calling, but proved faithful to it.

The significance of Peter as an "*Apostle*" is most remarkable. He was among the inner-circle of the Apostles, being named first among them: "*Peter, James, and John.*" He was among the only three men in history who saw Jesus transfigured (Matt 17:1). He was the first of three who were allowed by Jesus to see Jairus' daughter raised from the dead (Mk 5:37). He also was listed as the first of the three whom Jesus took with him further into Gethsemane, when His soul was "*exceeding sorrowful unto death*" (Lk 14:33-34).

Peter wrote this book around 65 A.D., after more than thirty years of faithful Apostleship. Church history records that he preached in Rome, Britain, and Gaul. He was martyred for his testimony by wicked Nero around 67 A.D., about the same time Nero also had Paul beheaded. He met his death in an unusual way, as Jesus told him he would. "*Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.*" This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, '*Follow Me*'" (John 21:18-29). History provides some details about the death of Peter. He was crucified with his head down at his own request. We are told he affirmed he was unworthy to die as his Lord. I share the following quote about Peter's closing days to confirm his greatness in the Kingdom. "*How Peter managed to survive those nine long dreadful months is beyond human imagination. During his entire incarceration, he was manacled in a upright position, chained to the column, unable to lie down and rest. Yet his magnificent spirit remained undaunted. It flamed with the immortal fervor of his noble soul, proclaiming the glory of God, through His Son, Jesus Christ*" William Steuart McBernie, THE SEARCH FOR THE TWELVE APOSTLES. Thus I pay tribute to this princely Apostle of Christ, thanking God for the most noble testimony he has left with us, and for his receptivity to God's Spirit in the writing of this Epistle.

TO THE STRANGERS

"*. . . to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.*" The recipients of this Epistle were citizens of heaven, and therefore "*strangers*" in the world. Because of their spiritual status, the world rejected them, thereby constituting them "*strangers.*" Other versions accentuate the unique condition of these saints. "To the pilgrims of the Dispersion."^{NKJV} "To those who reside as aliens, scattered."^{NASB} "Strangers in the world, scattered."^{NIV} "The exiles of the Dispersion."^{RSV} The word "*scattered*" comes from a word meaning *dispersion*, referring specifically (but not limited) to the converted Israelites resident in Gentile countries, which were scattered abroad.^{STRONGS} From the Jewish viewpoint, these are the same people mentioned in John 7:34-35. "*You will seek Me and not find Me, and where I am you cannot come. Then the Jews said among themselves, 'Where does He intend to go that we shall not find Him? Does He intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks?'*"^{NKJV} James also addresses these scattered Jews: "*to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad*" (James 1:1).

These were doubtless some of the believers that heard the Gospel at Pentecost, who were "*Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven*" (Acts 2:5). Several of these areas are mentioned as represented at that time (Acts 2:9). They had originally been dispersed among the nations because of their refusal to believe God. Moses prophesied this would happen (Lev 26:33). Isaiah referred to "*the dispersed of Judah*" (Isa 11:12). Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel refer to this dispersion as the work

of God Himself (Jer 30:11; Ezek 11:16).

As confirmed by the following verses, these were not merely Jews, they were believers in Jesus Christ, born again, and accepted by God. In this circumstance, we have people involved in a Divine curse and blessing at the same time. According to the flesh, they remained among the scattered Jews. According to the Spirit, they were “*strangers*” or “*sojourners*” in the world. Such a dichotomy of experience is common to all saints. They are presently occupying a cursed world, while holding the status of citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20). Later, Peter will appeal to our status as “*strangers and pilgrims*,” admonishing us to “*abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul*” (1 Pet 2:11). Although this is a very basic, or fundamental, view of the people of God, I find it is rarely acknowledged in the contemporary church. Affinity with “*this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4) is altogether too common among those professing to be followers of Jesus.

The areas of “*Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*” represented all of Asia Minor (the area of Turkey, Armenia, and Iran) from Euxine to Cappadocia. It is a vast area, and far removed from the land promised to Israel (about 700+ miles North). While they had been “*scattered*,” and were found among heathen peoples, yet they were not forsaken. Jesus had called Peter to be the Apostle to the circumcision, or Jews. Yet, that did not mean he was confined to the area of Jerusalem or Judea. The Jews had been scattered into remote sections of the world. Peter’s ministry included those people as well as the ones residing within the promised land itself.

The identity of “*strangers*” is worthy of some elaboration. Ancient Israel is said to have “*dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt*” (Ex 22:21; 23:9; Acts 13:17). The patriarchs are said to have confessed they were “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Heb 11:13). By this, the Spirit means they did not belong in the place they occupied. They were a people belonging to another place, and did not fit into the culture in which they found themselves. Whether we consider the land of Egypt, Pontus and Cappadocia, or the earth as a whole, the people of God are not of that order. God has given the saints to Jesus “*out of the world*” (John 17:6). As they walk with Him, they cannot blend in with the world. They simply are “*not of the world*,” just as Jesus was “*not of the world*” (John 17:16). The strength of this Epistle will be realized only to the degree that this circumstance is recognized and embraced. Only “*strangers*” here will profit from a heavenly message!

LESSON #2

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“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” (1 Peter 1:2)

INTRODUCTION

There are some utterances in Scripture that cannot be made to fit into preconceived theological patterns of thought. They are so lofty they jar upon the religious bias’ of men. Those lacking a commitment to the truth itself are prone to wrest such Scriptures, as Peter affirms in Second Peter 3:16. We have just such a passage before us. There is no question about the words of the text. They are *“weighty and powerful.”* It is clear that Peter has no trouble with the words, and neither should we. He will tell us in a fresh way HOW and WHY we have been saved. He will not trace it to a human strategy or response, but to the Living God, the Holy Spirit, and our Jesus Christ our Lord. He will make no apologies for the strength of his affirmations, or modify them with convenient explanations. Through Him, the Holy Spirit will powerfully affirm Divine involvement in our salvation from the beginning to the end. He will tell us it was initiated by God, implemented by the Spirit, and made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ. Affirmations like this exercise a powerful influence upon the soul, and are to be received in faith, nothing doubting. They will not contradict any other Divine statement, and will, when believed, bring honor and glory to God and Christ, and great joy and peace to the soul.

DIVINE ELECTION AND FOREKNOWLEDGE

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father . . .” ^(KJV) The NIV reads, *“who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”* The NRSV reads, *“who have been chosen and destined by God.”* It is at once obvious that we are dealing with a profound and uncommon reality. It must be clear to us that the Spirit is explaining our salvation, and doing so in such a manner as to exclude all human boasting. Also, it is done in such a way as to provoke thanksgiving and praise.

The word *“elect”* is especially powerful, and is often used to describe the people of God. It is NEVER used to portray what they have done, however necessary that may be, but always affirms that the Lord has done. The word itself means “chosen, or selected.” It is used twenty-seven times in the New Testament Scriptures, is often translated *“chosen,”* and **always** refers to Divine choice, never human choice (Matt 22:14; 24:22,24,31; Mk 13:20,22,27; Lk 23:35; Rom 16:13; Col 3:12; 2 Tim 2:10; 2 Pet 1:2; 2:4,6,9; 2 John 1,13; Rev 17:14). There is a consistent pattern in Scripture that is worthy of noting. All that is good in us, is invariably ascribed to the Lord and His choice. This includes both willingness and doing (Phil 2:13). The virtues found in us are expressly called *“the fruit of the Spirit”* (Gal 5:22-24). Our good works were *“prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10). Whatever difficulties may be associated with this, the choice is said to have occurred *“before the foundation of the world”* (Eph 1:4), and *“according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began”* (2 Tim 1:1).

The worth of the saved is not owing to their own accomplishments, or even their own choice, though both are involved in salvation. Paul said he was *“bound to give thanks”* for the Thessalonian brethren, not because of what they had achieved, but *“because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth”* (2 Thess 2:13). As declared in our text, God does use means, not simply making the choice arbitrarily. Yet, it is His choice that is the determining factor, as is everywhere so affirmed.

The Lord Jesus Himself is called both “*Elect*” and “*Chosen*” (Isa 42:1; 1 Pet 2:4,6). Even though our Lord volunteered to come into the world (Phil 2:5-8; Heb 10:4-9), yet He did not take this honor to Himself, but was “*called of God*” for His work (Heb 5:4-5). And what servant of Christ can boast of a higher calling than His Lord? Who can dare to ascribe more glory to their choice than to that of God Himself. Lest the people of God be tempted to boast, they are reminded God has forgiven them “*for Christ’s sake*” (Eph 4:32), and that Christ received them from God for His glory (John 6:37; Heb 2:13; Rom 15:7).

Those in Christ are categorically said to be “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God.*” Paul also refers to God’s foreknowledge in Romans 8:29, saying those foreknown by God were predestinated “*to be conformed to the image of His Son.*” The “*foreknowledge*” of God is not mere foresight, like seeing what will happen in the future. This foreknowledge is one of purpose and determination. It is mentioned in regard to our Lord’s death, i.e., “*Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God*” (Acts 2:23). Confirming this, the disciples later prayed concerning those who killed Jesus, that they “*gathered together*” together against Christ “*to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done*” (Acts 4:28).

In the end, salvation in its entirety will be ascribed to the Lord. As it is written, “*Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb! . . . Salvation and glory and honor and power belong to the Lord our God!*” (Rev 7:10; 19:1). Dissenting voices may presently be heard in the world, but there will not be a single person in glory who will disagree with that affirmation. Settle it in your mind that salvation, from beginning to end, is of the Lord. That is the meaning of “*Alpha and Omega,*” “*Beginning and End,*” and “*Author and Finisher*” (Heb 12:2; Rev 1:8). As we will see, we **are** involved in the process, but that involvement is consistently traced back to Divine influence. At no point, nor in any aspect, of coming to and receiving Christ, is human activity divorced from the work of God. That such separation is possible is consistently refuted in the Word of God.

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT

“*. . . through sanctification of the Spirit . . .*”^(KJV). When Jesus was preparing His disciples for His return to heaven, He told them He would send the Holy Spirit. His work would include convincing the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). Now Peter extends that work into everything related to salvation. Jesus had already said no one could come to Him unless the Father drew him (John 6:44,65). He even affirmed that everyone the Father gave Him would come to Him (John 6:37). A brief consideration of this aspect of our salvation will serve to confirm the wonderful work that has been wrought in those who are in Christ Jesus.

Ponder the fact of repentance, something essential to the enjoyment of salvation. It is affirmed that Jesus “*gives repentance*” (Acts 5:31), and that God Himself also gives “*repentance to the acknowledging of the truth*” (2 Tim 2:25-26). When it was reported that the Gentiles had believed the Gospel, those hearing it confessed, “*Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life*” (Acts 11:18). Take the matter of confessing that Jesus is Lord. It is written, “*no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor 12:3). Even our baptism is associated with the Holy Spirit. “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*” (1 Cor 12:13). All of this is included in the phrase “*through sanctification of the Holy Spirit.*”

There simply can be no participation in salvation without the involvement of the Holy Spirit. This is also affirmed to the Thessalonians. “*God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth*” (2 Thess 2:13). Should men site their belief of the truth as their own work, it is also declared men “*receive the love of the truth that they might be saved*” (2 Thess 2:10). Again, it is written, “*it has been granted on behalf of Christ . . . to believe in Him*” (Phil 1:29). Just as surely as the Spirit of God “*moved upon the face of the*

deep”before the natural creation, so He broods over the souls of men before the spiritual recreation.

When Paul spoke of his effective ministry among the Gentiles, He gave the credit to the productive work of the Holy Spirit. “. . . *because of the grace given to me by God, that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 15:16). Were it not for the ministry of the Holy Spirit, none of us would be received by God, regardless of our accomplishments or profession. Lest we view this in a carnal manner, the Holy Spirit will not fail to perform the ministry to which He has been appointed. I understand God’s appointments to always involve tender, humble, and contrite hearts. He has declared He is attracted to such individuals, fully known only to Him (Isa 57:15; 66:2).

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit does not end when we are placed into Christ by the Father (1 Cor 1:30). Every aspect of our salvation is associated with the work of God Himself, for “*it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13). When, for example, we find hope increasing within our hearts, it is due to the influence of the Spirit. “*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 15:13). If our hearts are rejoicing in the Lord, the Spirit is at work within us, “*for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 14:17). When our hearts are filled with the awareness of God’s love, and we ourselves abound in that love, it is because of the work of the Holy Spirit. “*The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us*” (Rom 5:5).

Do not wonder that we are admonished not to quench the Spirit. He is the One who sanctifies, or sets us apart, for Divine use. If at any point we are left on our own, we will fail. Jesus said, “*without me, you can do nothing*” (John 15:5). His involvement with us, whether in salvation or sanctification, is through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. That is in strict accordance with the purpose of God, and well ought we to thank Him for it.

SANCTIFIED FOR OBEDIENCE

“ . . . *unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.*”^{KJV} The NIV reads, “*for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*” The NASB reads, “*that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.*” Lest the glorious truth declared induce men to slothfulness, and the supposition that our input is not involved, we are informed of the Divine purpose behind the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. It is twofold: (1) *Unto obedience*, and (2) *The sprinkling of Christ’s blood*.

UNTO OBEDIENCE. Here is a most unpopular term among those who are casual about their faith, if, indeed, they have faith at all. Mind you, Jesus could not save us without Himself being “*obedient*” (Phil 2:8). He said of His activities, “*I always do those things that please Him*” (John 8:29). He confessed, “*My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work*” (John 4:34). Before He came into the world, He was the One who was obeyed, not the One who obeyed. Thus, He had to learn how to obey. And, indeed, that is precisely what He did. As it is written, “*He learned obedience by the things which He suffered*” (Heb 5:8). How could it be, therefore, that disobedience could be countenanced among those claiming identity with Him?

Later, Peter will trace our obedience back to the power of the Spirit. “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit*” (1:22). It is “*through the Spirit*” that we “*mortify the deeds of the body,*” as we are commanded to do (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5). If Jesus is “*the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*” (Heb 5:9), then we have an intense interest in obedience! When Paul gave thanks to the Lord for the Romans, it was because they “*obeyed*” (Rom

6:17). His rejoicing in the Philippians was owing to the fact they “*have always obeyed*” (Phil 2:12). Obedience reveals the work of the Holy Spirit. Disobedience divulges that the Spirit has been quenched, grieved, and resisted. There is no salvation apart from obedience, and there is no obedience apart from the Holy Spirit.

SPRINKLING OF THE BLOOD OF JESUS. This is the language of sanctification, of setting people apart for the Lord. The “*sprinkling of blood*” was instituted under the Law to prepare people for the coming of Christ—to develop in them an awareness of Divine requirements. Repeatedly, we are told of the sprinkling of blood in association with the tabernacle service (Ex 29:16,20; Lev 1:5). Of particular significance is the sprinkling of everything associated with Divine ceremony. The consecration of Aaron, his sons, and their garments involved the sprinkling of blood (Ex 29:21). Moses, we are reminded, took the blood of goats and calves and “*sprinkled both the book (of the Law), and all the people*” (Heb 9:19). He further “*sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle and all the vessels of the ministry*” (Heb 9:21). Thus was everything and everyone set apart for the service of God Almighty. Without the shedding of blood, there was neither remission nor sanctification.

In this we see the dreadful influence sin has had upon us. We cannot serve God without being set aside by the blood of Christ to do so! Even the choice of God Himself required this work: “*the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*” God cannot receive our persons or our works apart from the blood of Jesus! Even though He chooses us, He cannot use us until the sanctifying blood of Jesus is identified with us—sprinkled, as it were, upon us. This should provoke a swell of thanksgiving for the blood of Christ!

GRACE AND PEACE. Both grace and peace come from God, and are frequently invoked upon the people of God (Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:3; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2; Phil 1:2; Col 1:2; 2 Pet 1:2; 2 John 3; Rev 1:4). The reason for this invocation is found in the necessity of Divine favor and the tranquility of soul. However, Peter is not content for us to merely have a sample of grace and peace. He prays for its multiplication—for the realization of a superabundance of both. He knows, from one view, the righteous will be “*scarcely saved*” (1 Pet 4:18). The NASB reads the righteous are saved “*with difficulty,*” while the NIV reads “*it is hard for the righteous to be saved.*” That explains the many exhortations directed to the godly. It also unveils the reason for a multiplication of both grace and peace!

LESSON #3

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (1 Peter 1:3)

INTRODUCTION

The reading of the Epistles, letters written to believers in Christ, will confirm the presence of a remarkable consistency. In all of them, the Spirit strongly avouches the standing of the people of God—who they are, and what they have received in Christ Jesus. While duties and responsibilities are covered, the accent is always on what we have experienced in Christ Jesus. The knowledge of these realities forms a spiritual environment in which the will of God can be joyfully pursued by the believer. Life in Christ Jesus cannot be lived without the awareness of what has occurred to us in salvation. We have not simply had our sins forgiven, but have come into the newness of life as well. In the beginning verses of this Epistle, the Holy Spirit moves upon Peter to state our present status, as well as what is to come, with unusual power. In both cases, the expressions are brief, yet pregnant with life-giving truth. In this particular text, a snapshot of the whole of salvation is given. It begins with our new birth, adding what is occurring now, and what we are destined to obtain. Who but God could speak in such a concise yet powerful way!

BEGOTTEN ACCORDING TO ABUNDANT MERCY

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”^{NKJV} The phrase “*Blessed be the God,*” or “*Blessed be God*” is mentioned at least six times in Scripture (Dan 3:28; Eph 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3; Psa 66:20; 68:35; 2 Cor 1:3), while “*Blessed be the Lord*” is used no less than 29 times. The phrase literally means (from a language point of view) that God is worthy of praise or blessing (as in, “*Bless the Lord, O my soul*”—Psa 103:1-2). In my judgment, however, that does not satisfy the intent of the text. The emphasis here is that God IS blessed by the salvation accomplished by Christ Jesus. That is why the Gospel is called, “*the glorious Gospel of the BLESSED God*” (1 Tim 1:11). It is also the ONLY reason we can bless the Lord. God saw the travail of Christ’s soul, and was “*satisfied*” (Isa 53:11). He was “*well pleased*” with His Son at the threshold of His ministry (Matt 3:17), and at the peak of His earthly ministry (Matt 17:5).

In raising Jesus from the dead, the Father confirmed that His sacrifice had fully satisfied His requirements, taking away the sin of the world, and crushing the head of the serpent. He then “*highly exalted His Son,*” giving Him a name that is “*above every name,*” and charging Him to bring “*many sons to glory*” (Phil 2:9-10; Heb 2:10). **Thus, in redemption, we are brought to a pleased and joyful God.** This is a most unique situation. Under the Law, Israel was given a Law that required THEY please the Lord in a foundational way. The whole of their religion is captured in this statement: “*You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD*” (Lev 18:5). The phrase “*he shall live by them*” means that in perfectly obeying the commands of God, He would be well pleased, thus conferring life upon the doer of the Law. The outcome of this arrangement was not good, for the Law “*was weak through the flesh*” (Rom 8:3), thus making it impossible for God to be pleased with men.

How different it is in Christ Jesus! Now, God is already pleased, blessed, and joyful. It only remains to “*receive the atonement*” (reconciliation) that has pleased God (Rom 5:11). In fact, it is only when we are found in Christ Jesus that we are capable of blessing the Lord. Now, when we come to the Father, we come through the One who has brought Him great gladness—His only begotten Son. It is “*for Christ’s sake*” that He has forgiven us (Eph 4:32), and it is because of Christ that God has received us. When we recognize that reality, and come to Him in thanksgiving

for His great salvation, we bless Him, and He is greatly pleased with us. That circumstance is what brings power into our lives.

“The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here is a view of God that is central in the New Covenant. Repeatedly the Father is associated with our Savior in this manner (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; 3:14; Col 1:13). This is a redemptive view of God, and differs significantly from the view entertained by those under the Old Covenant. To the Jews, God presented Himself as *“the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”* (Ex 3:6; 4:5; 1 Kgs 18:36). By this, the Lord signified that the ancient people were being blessed because of the association God had with their *“fathers,”* not because of their own persons. It is as though He said, *If it were not for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I could not receive you.* Even though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had faith, and were precious in God’s sight, yet the basis upon which He blessed Israel through them was the **promise** made to them (Gen 12:3; 26:4; 28:14). That blessing is fully realized in Christ Jesus (Acts 13:22).

In salvation, the basic relationship is between the Father and the Son. He is primarily *“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The New Covenant, for example, is mainly between the Father and the Son, who is *“the Seed”* (Gal 3:16). Our own relation to God as *“the sons of God”* (1 John 3:1-2) is by virtue of our identity with Jesus. As elementary as that may appear, Satan has been remarkably successful in diverting the attention of believers from the Lord Jesus Christ to other things. Peter, as directed by the Holy spirit, brings our thinking back to the foundation of our faith. Our Father is chiefly the *“God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Our salvation is an expression of that relationship. We are never closer to God than when we recognize and confess this to be the case.

BEGOTTEN ACCORDING TO ABUNDANT MERCY

“ . . . who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again.”^{NKJV} It is the manner of the Holy Spirit to continually remind us that we have been born again— begotten of God. This is particularly precious when we recognize the necessity of the new birth to either see or enter the Kingdom of God (John 3:3-6). Thus, we are said to have been raised from death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1), become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), and are *“created in Christ Jesus”* (Eph 2:10). The Spirit makes reference to *“the washing of regeneration”* (Tit 3:5), the putting on of *“the new man”* (Col 3:10), and being made *“free from the law of sin and death”* (Rom 8:2). James reminds us that God, *“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures”* (James 1:18). Later, Peter will affirm we have been *“born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever”* (1:23). The people of God Are a new *“generation”* of people—a *“chosen generation and a royal priesthood”* (1 Pet 2:9). Much should be made of this blessing!

God Himself has *“begotten”* us. He has done so because of our acceptance of the Son. As it is written, *“Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God”* (1 John 5:1). John also writes, *“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”* (John 1:12-13). Many believers are scarcely aware of the blessedness of their state—that they have actually been born again. Rarely are they reminded of this blessedness from religious leaders. In my judgment, much of the deficiency found in believers is directly owing to this circumstance. We cannot expect believers to live righteously if they lack the understanding of who they are in Christ Jesus. Your study of the Scriptures will confirm the Spirit always takes care to apprise the children of God of who they are, where they have come, and what is reserved for them.

Observe the striking manner in which our new birth is identified: *“according to His abundant mercy.”* This expression not only accentuates the character of God, but the depths to which sin had taken us. In redemption, God has provided a means through which He can be *“Just and the Justifier*

of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). Even so, His justness by no means eliminates His mercy. Herein is a great mystery. In the world, it is either justice OR mercy. It cannot be both. The existence of mercy presumes that justice was abandoned in favor of clemency. On the other hand, the imposition of justice presumes there is no need for mercy. However, in considering the rescue of men from the guilt and ravages of sin, such simplistic views have no place. Salvation, by necessity, involves both Divine justice and Divine mercy! Our rebirth is just, or right, because it is based upon the merit of Jesus and the acceptance of His work. It is merciful because our basic condition had to be changed, else God could not receive us.

The mercy required to regenerate us is “*abundant,*” liberal and copious. Our salvation requires that it be so, because the remnants of sin remain in us. In attributing our salvation to God, the Spirit says, “*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ*” (Eph 2:4-5). Elsewhere it is written, “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life*” (Tit 3:5-7). Even after we have been justified, we are urged to “*come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Heb 4:16).

However far we may feel that we have advanced, faith will never take us beyond the perimeter of Divine mercy. From time to time, we become acutely aware of our need of it. It is then that we may rejoice in its abundance. The same God who begat us through His abundant mercy will also keep us through the same means.

WHY WE HAVE BEEN BEGOTTEN OF GOD

“*. . . to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*”^{NKJV} Why is it that God has begotten us in the first place? Was it simply to cover our past? Perhaps it was to be of lasting benefit to our own generation? Or, that we might save others. All of these things are surely involved, but none of them are the foundational reason for regeneration. God Himself has birthed us “*to (or, in order to) a living hope.*” The NIV reads, “*He has given us new birth into a living hope.*” By this, the Spirit separates life in Christ from all lifeless routine and futility. The Old Covenant, it is written, was “*concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation*”^{NKJV} (Heb 9:10). But a blessed new day has dawned upon those who are in Christ Jesus! They are associated with life. They have been begotten again by the “*living Word*” (1:23), have come to a “*living Stone*” (2:4), and are themselves “*living stones*” (2:5). Death, or a lack of activity and response, have no part in the New Covenant.

By saying we have been begotten “*to a living hope,*” at least two things are emphasized. First, we have been brought into a life of joyful expectancy. Second, we have been born again in order to obtain something that cannot be fully possessed while we remain in this world. You will at once notice that both of these are most unusual in many religious circles. Their absence, however, is by no means normal. In fact, it is unacceptable.

A “*living hope*” is a dominating one, and is never in the background. It is an appointed means through which we work out our own salvation “*with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:13). As it is written, “*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?*” (Rom 8:24). The anticipation of the future is a powerful incentive that enables us to live triumphantly in the midst of fierce conflict. The grace of God clarifies this hope for us, shining it, as it were, into our hearts. As it is written, “*For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and*

glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"NKJV (Tit 2:11-13). Where this hope is lacking, the objective of the new birth, if it has been experienced at all, is not being realized.

The fact that we have been begotten in order to a "*living hope*" confirms that we have "*not yet apprehended*" that for which we "*have been apprehended*" (Phil 3:13). With a "*living hope*," this world cannot be the center of our attention. The very prominence of hope declares that we see the future as more promising than the present, and are willing to forsake all to obtain it. In fact, believers "*rejoice in hope of the glory of God*" (Rom 5:2).

"Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." It is challenging to consider what is required for us to be born again. God could not simply speak us into that condition. The impact of sin upon us forbade that type of creation. We were "*begotten again*" by means of "*the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" That is, His resurrection life is given to us in the new birth. That is what it means to be "*raised*" to walk "*in newness of life*" (Rom 6:4). It is not simply that we are raised from union with Christ's death to adopt a different life style. That is not what is meant by "*newness of life.*" Being raised with Christ, we actually participate in the very resurrection life of Jesus. It is not that we emulate the kind of life He lived during His sojourn in the world. The life He now possesses at the right hand of God—His resurrection life—has become ours. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Gal 2:20a). Now Christ is actually "*formed*" in the believer (Gal 4:19).

This truth is wonderfully announced in the first and second chapters of Ephesians. There it is affirmed that God has raised us up together with Christ, seating us in the heavenly realms in Him (1:20-2:1). Our elevation to "*heavenly places*" is very real, as well as the "*spiritual blessings*" that are resident there (1:3; 2:6). All of this is true because the very life of the risen Christ has been given to us. The conferment of that gift is what constitutes the new birth. How marvelous to consider these realities.

LESSON #4

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

(1 Peter 1:4-5)

INTRODUCTION

Only the Spirit can speak in such concise, yet meaningful language. We are in the midst of a presentation of our status in Christ—how it was initiated, and how it is maintained. The whole of our salvation is traced back to the purpose of God, the effective work of the Holy Spirit, and the powerful effects of Christ’s death. Our obedience and our dedication to God through the sprinkling of Christ’s blood are the declared objectives of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit (v. 2). The purpose for which we were born again, and the means of obtaining it are expressed (v. 3). The nature of our inheritance, where it is, and how we are guaranteed of obtaining it are spelled out (vs. 4-5). In these few verses, our attention has been drawn to the foreknowledge of God, the sanctifying work of the Spirit, and the blood of Christ. The multiplication of grace and peace is declared to be for us. God has willed to cause our new birth through His mercy and in order to a living hope—all by the resurrection of Christ. It is difficult to conceive of more truth being poured into such a few words. This is the manner of Divine instruction, and it is effective.

BEGOTTEN IN ORDER TO AN INHERITANCE

“^{3b-4} . . . begotten . . . to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”^{NKJV} The objective of our salvation cannot be fully realized in a cursed and decaying world. As Micah would say, *“this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction”* (Micah 2:10). Here, in my judgment, is an aspect of our salvation that has been sorely neglected. The Spirit, however, will not allow such neglect. He will now bring us back to a serious consideration of what lies ahead. We have been begotten *“to an inheritance,”* or *“to OBTAIN an inheritance.”^{NASB}* Remove the inheritance, and there is no reason for the new birth! We are *“saved by hope”* (Rom 8:24), or by the joyful anticipation of the future. It should at once be apparent that this future does not have to do with this *“present evil world,”* for it is destined to *“pass away”* (Matt 24:35; 2 Pet 3:10). A religion, therefore, that focuses upon this world cannot reflect the mind or purpose of the Lord.

INCORRUPTIBLE—The inheritance for which we have been begotten again is *“incorruptible,”* or incapable of passing away. It stands to reason, therefore, that we also must become incorruptible. Already, we have been born again through *“incorruptible”* seed, even the Word of God (1 Pet 1:23). Further, in the resurrection, our bodies will become *“incorruptible”* (1 Cor 15:52). Thus, in the world to come, we will be perfectly adapted for the *“inheritance”* for which we have been begotten. The best of this world is described by Jesus as things *“moth and rust doth corrupt”* (Matt 6:19). Sin has brought frailty and temporality into the natural realm. Grace is preparing us for an inheritance marked by neither frailty nor corruption. Faith will cause us to long for the incorruptible and thrust what is corruptible into the background of life.

UNDEFILED—In this world, defilement is found everywhere. Sin has contaminated the whole heavens and earth, compelling God to cast the mantle of mortality upon the whole of them (Rom 8:20). To be *“undefiled”* is to be uncontaminated or pure. Nothing about our inheritance will defile or weaken us. Nothing about it will need to be minimized or thrust from us. Sin has contaminated the universe, but it has not contaminated our inheritance! Whatever tends to defile, or introduce

spiritual erosion, is not of God. Whether it is a possession or a relationship, if it is defiled, it must eventually be left behind. Our inheritance is not defiled, and our new birth prepares us for it.

FADES NOT AWAY—The fairest things of this world eventually “fade,” decline, weaken, and deteriorate. How appropriately Isaiah describes the condition introduced by sin. “*But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; We all **FADE** as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away*” (Isa 64:6). OF THE RICH MAN, James writes, “*So the rich man also will fade away in his pursuits*” (James 1:11). But we have been born again to an inheritance that is not so identified! It never wanes, diminishes, or becomes less. There is nothing about it that can erode or wear away. If our inheritance seems less to us now than it did before, it is owing to a lack of faith, not any inferiority in the inheritance. We must see that anything that tends to subside, slacken, or diminish cannot be the objective of our new birth. Such things must not be allowed prominence in our thinking or our lives. God has raised us from death in trespasses and sins to an inheritance that “*fades not away.*”

RESERVED IN HEAVEN—Jesus once said, “*I go to prepare a place for you*” (John 14:2). Some have concluded a sort of heavenly construction or work in progress was intended. But this is not the case. It was Christ’s going itself that prepares the way for us. In a very real sense, “*The works were finished from the foundation of the world*” (Heb 4:3). Our inheritance is “*eternal*” (Heb 9:15). It includes God Himself (Ezek 44:28), an incorruptible body (2 Cor 5:1-5), an eternal reign (Rev 22:5), and a new heavens and earth (2 Pet 3:13; Matt 5:5). Our inheritance is presently “*in heaven,*” with our Lord. While you must wait to obtain it, it is nevertheless “*reserved in heaven for you.*” Your name is on it, so to speak, and only time stands between you and its possession! Fight the good fight!

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD THROUGH FAITH

“*. . . who are kept by the power of God through faith.*”^{NKJV} Time seems to introduce serious jeopardy concerning obtaining the inheritance. Often, the smallest of circumstances seem to obscure glory and accentuate corruption. How will we be able to survive the onslaughts of the devil and our own natural wretchedness. As Paul would say, “*And who is sufficient for these things?*” (2 Cor 2:16). Indeed, were we left to “*our own devices*” (Jer 18:12), we would soon despair. However, salvation does not leave us dependent upon ourselves or natural resources.

KEPT BY THE POWER OF GOD. The very “*power of God*” is employed to maintain us in a cursed world. Divine power is engaged to keep us as well as save us—to uphold us as well as initially rescue us. The same God who delivered Israel from Egypt kept them in the wilderness. The God who delivered Joseph from the devices of his brothers kept him in Egypt. The God who commissioned Paul to go to the Gentiles kept him when he was in prison and treacherous circumstances. How tragic it is that a generation still remains that “*know not . . . the power of God*” (Mk 12:24). Many followers of Jesus, because of flawed teaching, are not aware they are being “*kept by the power of God.*” It is exceedingly difficult to live for the Lord imagining that everything depends upon you. To be sure, every ounce of your effort is required. Nevertheless, the honest soul knows that is really not enough to keep us. What a glad announcement, therefore, that we are being “*kept by the power of God.*”

It is no wonder our faith is said to stand “*in the power of God*” (1 Cor 2:5). Like holy men of old, we acknowledge we are “*weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God*” (2 Cor 13:4). If we ever thought we had sufficient strength in ourselves, such foolishness was dissolved when we became aware of our position in Christ Jesus. Concerning our own strength, we became “*weak in Him.*” Thus we placed our confidence in “*the power of God,*” gaining assurance that He is “*able to keep us from falling, and present us faultless before His throne with exceeding joy*” (Jude 24).

This is “*His power toward us who believe*”—a power that is intended for us. The nature of this power was revealed in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Of this power the Spirit says, “*according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come*” (Eph 1:19-21). That is precisely the power that is presently keeping us—keeping us to obtain the inheritance for which we were begotten of God (Acts 20:32; 26:18; Eph 1:11,14; Col 1:12; Heb 9:15). David once said, “*He will keep the feet of His saints*” (2 Sam 2:9). It is written of the righteous man, “*Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the LORD upholds him with His hand*” (Psa 37:24). The Lord “*does not forsake His saints; They are preserved forever*” (Psa 37:28).

THROUGH FAITH--Lest we become complacent, the means through which we are kept is declared: **FAITH**. Where there is no faith, there is no keeping. However, praise the Lord, where faith is found, the power of God is keeping the believing one. This is why it is written, “*you stand by faith*” (Rom 11:20). It is not that faith itself upholds you. Rather, it is the appointed means through which God’s power keeps you. Again, it is written, “*for by faith you stand*” (2 Cor 1:24). This is why we “*live by faith*” (Gal 2:20). God cannot and will not ignore your faith. He gave it to you, and He uses it to sustain you.

The importance of building ourselves up in the most holy faith is at once apparent (Jude 20). When we are “*strong in the faith*” (Rom 4:20), we become invincible against the devices of the devil. The glory for this situation all belongs to God, for it is His power that keeps us. If we devote ourselves to believing, God will see to it that we stand. Of even the weakest believer it is said, “*God is able to make him stand*” (Rom 14:4). But He will do so through his faith. As Jesus said, “*Have faith in God*” (Mk 11:22).

A SALVATION READY TO BE REVEALED

“*. . . for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*”^{NKJV} And why does the power of God “*keep*” us? Why is it necessary to keep us? First, we must see that the whole of salvation has not yet been experienced. We have but “*the firstfruits of the Spirit*” (Rom 8:23). The bulk of our salvation is yet to come.

The completion of our salvation, or the revelation of it, is an emphasis of Scripture. “*And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed*” (Rom 13:11). “*Are they (the holy angels) not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?*” (Heb 1:14). “*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life*” (Rom 5:9-10). We are en route to glory, and have not yet arrived. We have received the “*earnest*,” or pledge, of our inheritance, and not the whole of it (Eph 1:14). We are to conduct our lives in an acute awareness of this reality, not living as though we have already finished the course and were in the promised land.

Here is a message faith requires: the salvation is “*ready to be revealed.*” While we are working out our own salvation (Phil 2:12), we are contributing nothing to it. We were born again to obtain the inheritance. It is not obtained by our work, though we will not enter into it without “*the work of faith*” being fulfilled in us “*with power*” (2 Thess 1:11). Herein is a great mystery. There is a sense in which our labors determine the measure of our inheritance. As it is written, “*Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things*” (Matt 25:21). And again, “*He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*” (2 Cor 9:6). It is possible to “*suffer loss*” in the day of the Lord (1 Cor

3:15). However, the inheritance itself is already in tact. It but remains how much of it we will possess.

The “*great salvation*” (Heb 2:3) brought to us by Jesus is infinitely larger than ordinarily conceived. Throughout the centuries, the people of God have been subjected to minuscule views of this salvation, and thus have not extended themselves to obtain its fulness. Our hearts must take hold of these words: “*Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory*” (2 Tim 2:10). Paul extended himself because he knew the saints could “*come short*” of the “*rest*” reserved for them (Heb 4:1).

Salvation in all of its fulness is “*ready to be revealed.*” In a very real sense, the “*kingdom*” you will inherit was “*prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matt 25:34). Just as the land of Canaan was reserved for the children of Israel, so our inheritance is reserved for us. The only question is whether we will possess it or not. It is possible to be a “*castaway*,” forfeiting the inheritance altogether (1 Cor 9:27). It is also possible to “*suffer loss*,” not possessing the fulness of our inheritance. However, if our hearts are convinced of its greatness and worthiness, and if we remain strong in faith, we will obtain more than we have dared to imagine. If God can do “*exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think*” now, in this time (Eph 3:20), what can be said of the “*salvation that is ready to be revealed?*” The only question that remains is our capacity to receive and handle the inheritance reserved for us, and the salvation ready to be revealed.

The purpose of this teaching is to nourish hope, assisting us to look forward to “*the last time.*” Those living in aloofness from the Lord fear “*the last time.*” Those living in fellowship with Christ, and in the energy of faith, look forward to it. Our text is strongly affirming that when everything temporal is brought to a conclusion, everything that is eternal will be made known. In the interim, it is only to the degree that we are not distracted by the seen that we obtain any significant awareness of the unseen. As we take hold on the promises and nourish our faith, God, will keep us from the wicked one, and enable us to develop a large capacity for the “*salvation ready to be revealed.*”

LESSON #5

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:6-7, NASB)

INTRODUCTION

More and more, the pattern of Divine reasoning is becoming apparent to me. When the Spirit moved holy men to address the saints, He had a focused interest in their spiritual stability. Therefore, one of the primary things unfolded to believers is their **present status** in Christ Jesus—who they are, and what God is currently accomplishing in them. When believers are not sure of who they are, or when life becomes confusing to them, they become weak, and more easily fall prey to their adversary the devil. In view of this, the Spirit spends considerable time grounding our faith, and assuring our hearts that God is for us. When He comments on both the pleasant and unpleasant circumstances of life, He consistently does so from a heavenly point of view. Earthly, or fleshly, views are always debilitating, weakening the soul and opening the door for the entrance of both doubt and fear. Your own experience in the faith will confirm this to be the case. Now Peter, himself a fellow-sufferer, is used of God to show us what is being accomplished in us in the crucible of affliction. As we receive this word, the cup of life is sweetened, and we are able to successfully negotiate through life’s most difficult circumstances.

REJOICING THOUGH BRIEFLY TRIED

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials”^{NASB} The **“this”** in which we **“greatly rejoice”** is the whole of salvation that has just been mentioned. It includes **(1 The election of God, (2 The sanctification of the Spirit, (3 The multiplication of grace and peace, (4 The New birth, (5 A Living hope, (6 An incorruptible inheritance, (7 The keeping power of God, and (8 A salvation ready to be revealed.** It is difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of a more blessed condition.

The rejoicing produced by the embrace of these things is not ordinary. We **“greatly rejoice”** in the awareness of these unparalleled benefits. The word used here is **avgallia/sqe** (ag-al-lee-ahs'-the) and means **feeling and expressing** supreme joy. This is the same type of joy Jesus pronounced upon those suffering for righteousness sake. **“Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven”** (Matt 5:12). It is also the type of joy with which Jesus was anointed by the Father (Heb 1:9). John the Baptist leaped in his mother’s womb with this type of joy (Lk 1:44). Early believers experienced this following their response on Pentecost (Acts 2:46). This is also the type of joy believers will have when they stand before the presence of the Lord in the day of judgment (Jude 24).

This is an irrepressible rejoicing that leaps over the boundaries of hardship and grief. It causes suffering ones to sing at midnight (Acts 16:26). Abraham had this type of joy, as Jesus said, **“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad”** (John 8:56). The word **“exult”** better describes the joy of reference. This emphasizes the expression of the joy, or the impact it has upon our whole person. This joy can provoke loud shouts (Ezra 3:5), singing (Job 29:13), and leaping (Lk 6:23). Joy thus rises like a mighty giant to supplant grief and sorrow.

And what produces this dominating type of joy? It is not something that is poured upon us, causing us to laugh uncontrollably under an irrational and irresistible power. Whatever you may think of such a phenomenon (and it has no Scriptural precedent), at the very best, it is vastly inferior

to the type of joy in this text. The act of rejoicing itself is not the point, but the consideration that provokes it: ***“IN THIS you greatly rejoice.”*** When we ponder what we have experienced in Christ Jesus, it becomes exceedingly apparent that *“He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world”* (1 John 4:4).

But note the environment in which this joy is revealed! It dominates when, *“if need be,”* we are *“distressed by various trials.”* What a remarkable thing, that joy and distress, or *“heaviness”*^{KJV} can be experienced simultaneously: distress in the flesh, but joy in the Spirit. And, we are not dealing with happenstance. The trials are only *“for a **LITTLE** while,”* and ***“IF need be.”*** Trials are not easy, as the testing of both Job and Abraham confirm (Job 1-2; Gen 22:1-15). There is grief, distress, and heaviness associated with them. We willingly undergo the testing, however, knowing the objective of our God.

Notwithstanding, our trials only come *“if **NEED** be.”* By this He means God does not try us needlessly or without design. We are comforted by the knowledge that God has determined to do us good. As it is written, *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”*^{NIV} (Jer 29:11). If this was true of Israel, much more it is true of those in Christ Jesus. No trial comes your way that is not **NEEDED**—*“if need be!”* Oh, how easily this can escape the attention of the best among us! It is possible to respond to trial by murmuring, as the Israelites in the wilderness—a response against which we are warned (1 Cor 10:10).

The **brevity** (*“little while”*), **hardship** (*“distress”* or *“heaviness”*), **necessity** (*“if need be”*), and **endless variety** (*“various”* or *“manifold”*) of our trials may appear to be more than we can bear—but they are not! A due consideration of the *“great salvation”* in which we are participating, together with the prospect of its completion, will cause us to leap for joy in the midst of it all. It appears to me that there is a dearth of this type of joy among professed believers. Methinks this is the result of a lack of emphasis on the salvation of God. Let us seek to awaken souls to who they are and what they have in Christ Jesus!

THE PROOF OF YOUR FAITH

“ . . . that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire.”^{NASB} Right here, a devastating blow is dealt to the notion that men are secure in Christ independent of personal effort and diligence (i.e., “Once saved, always saved”). Men may take faith for granted, but God does not—and He knows all! Men may settle for a simple confession of faith, but God will not. He puts us to the test to see if we will hold to that confession in the heat of the furnace, the threat of the flood, and the barrenness of the desert. What person who believed was not put to the test? Whether in Noah, Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, or all those who followed, faith was tested.

The purpose of our trials is not to make us squirm, but to test, or prove, the faith we profess. It is one thing to say we believe, it is another thing to believe under stress, when the circumstances appear to contradict that we are the sons of God. When we are tried, it is not because God is not sure about us. *“The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His”* (2 Tim 2:19). But there are other spectators in this matter. We are compassed with a great *“cloud of witnesses”* who, in some way, behold our manners (Heb 12:1-2). We have also been made a *“spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men”* (1 Cor 4:9)—not to mention our Lord. God is given great honor and glory by the joyful survival of His people!

“The proof of your faith,” or *“the trial of your faith”* is a most intriguing theme. The test is not of the measure of the faith, but of the genuineness, or authenticity, of it. Thus, the NKJV and NRSV read, *“the genuineness of your faith.”* The NIV reads, *“that your faith ... may be proved genuine.”*

There is a sort of intellectual assent that parades itself as faith. But it is no faith at all, for it cannot stand under the fiery testing of God. It did not come from God, and thus cannot stand under stresses sent by God! To put it another way, faith is **verified** in the “*various trials*” of life. Although you already know this, denominational affiliation will not sustain the soul in trial, affliction, or tribulation. By “*sustain the soul*,” I do not mean merely survive, for men who worship idols have endured great difficulties in the name of their false gods. Real faith keeps trusting in God and looking to the future, even when heavy burdens seem to say there is no benefit in doing so.

The spirit reminds us that gold is tested by fire, and gold is not eternal, but “*perishable*.” Something that looks like gold, may not be gold at all. And even if it is, it may contain many impurities that significantly reduce its worth. Thus it is tested by a fire that impurities cannot endure, even though the gold can do so. It is the test that confirms what is really gold. So it is with the trying of our faith. **Faith can no more be destroyed by trial than gold can be fire.** It endures the test, even being purified by it. In confirmation of this, James says, “*the testing of your faith produces patience*,” or endurance (James 1:3). That is, faith keeps going even when obstacles are thrown in its path!

The confirmation of faith is more significant than the verification of gold that perishes. It is a grand discovery, indeed, when one finds his faith is real! Angels rejoice over such confirmation, as well the “*spirits of just men made perfect*,” into whose fellowship we have come (Heb 12:23). If the souls of the martyrs realized their blood had not yet been avenged, what must they know of their brethren that remain in the world (Rev 6:9-10). Are not the occupants of heavenly realms challenged to praise God upon the fall of the wicked as well as the stability of the righteous (Rev 12:12; 18:20; 19:5,7).

Suffice it to say, there is such a thing as **genuine faith**. It stands up under all manner of trials, and does so to the glory of God. It sustains the believer in all circumstances, and does so while the individual rejoices in hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:2). Our salvation includes the possession of this kind of faith—which is really the only kind there is. There is, after all, only “**ONE faith**” (Eph 4:5). That faith survives on the Lord’s “*threshing floor*” (Matt 3:12), where things that are NOT acceptable are purged, and what is acceptable remains. Such testings are, as our text affirms, necessary, or “*need be*.”

THE RESULT OF FAITH SEEN WHEN JESUS COMES

“*... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*”
^{NASB} The objective of our salvation extends beyond time. Salvation brings abundant provision for now, but is by no means confined to the present. We must not allow a notion of salvation to be entertained that accentuates the *here and now*. Faith not only produces blessing, it also brings trial. That trial confirms the genuineness, or authenticity of faith—but it does more than that. The objective of the intercession of Jesus and the ministry of the Holy Spirit is to prepare us for the coming of the Lord. If we do not stand in that day, we have gained no advantage whatsoever. **The “revelation of Jesus Christ” is the ultimate trial! A spurious or imagined faith will not be able to survive “the great and notable day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20).** Further, from one perspective, the very purpose of salvation is to ready us for this inevitable revelation. This disclosure is a Divine determination, and has been made known to us. “*Jesus Christ: which in His times He shall show, Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords*” (1 Tim 6:15). **In order to ensure our faith stands the test of that revelation, the Lord orchestrates preliminary trials for us here.**

The strength of this verse is remarkable. Faith—a tried faith— will “*result in praise and glory and honor*” when the Lord Jesus is “*revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus*”

Christ” (2 Thess 1:7-8). That will be the greatest “*fire*,” and thus the greatest test. But God is not willing to simply leave us to our own devices, as it were. He has declared, “*he that endureth to the end shall be saved*” (Matt 10:22). But that will not be left to mere chance, or the frailty of human strength. The Lord will build our confidence through “*manifold temptations*.” He will reinforce our conviction, develop our confidence, and stabilize our hope by putting us in the “*furnace of affliction*” (Isa 48:10).

These three things—“*praise, honor, and glory*”—are to be **experienced** by the saints. These do not refer to our activity, as in praising the Lord, honoring Him, and giving Him glory—although we will surely do all of that. These refer to God’s exceeding great reward to believers. As far back as 1 Samuel 2:20, God said, “*for them that honor Me I will honor*,” and there is no greater way to honor God than by a robust faith. God’s honor involves the Divine and public assessment, “*Well done, good and faithful servant*” (Matt 25:21). Such “*honor*” is to be sought by men, as indicated in the words of our Lord: “*How can ye believe, which receive honor one of another, and seek not the honor that cometh from God only?*” (John 5:44). Jesus promised, “*if any man serve me, him will my Father honor*” (John 12:26). The spirit spoke of eternal life being given to those who “*seek for glory and honor and immortality*” (Rom 2:7). The people of God are distinguished from the children of men, among other things, by being destined to receive “*praise from God*” (Rom 2:29; 1 Cor 4:5). When Jesus comes, He will be “*be glorified in His saints*” (1 Thess 1:10). It is then, and only then, that we will be “*glorified*” as He has determined (Rom 8:30; Col 3:4).

And what is it that determines these blessings will be consummated in us? It is true, it will be by Divine appointment, but not ONLY by Divine appointment. It is through “*various trials*” that God is bringing our faith to these determinations. Trials are preparing us, burning out the moral and spiritual dross that cannot enter into glory. They also strengthen the determination of believers, showing them they do not belong to this world and causing them to long for “*the world to come*.” **Unlike the flesh, faith flourishes in trial.** It does so because its eye is set on the future, and not the present. Faith brings a persuasion to the soul that “*that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom 8:38-39). The Lord has determined this can ONLY be known in the ordeal of testing. It will never be realized by mere human analysis or adopting a creed, however sound it may be. Thus we see the truth confirmed, that trials are working for us (2 Cor 4:17).

LESSON #6

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“⁸Whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,⁹ receiving the end of your faith; the salvation of your souls.”^{NKJV} (1 Pet 1:8-9)

INTRODUCTION

Christ Jesus is the heart of the Kingdom of God, His great salvation, and the New Covenant. All of these are but different aspects of our reconciliation to God. The Kingdom of God views the matter from the standpoint of its government and purpose. The great salvation is the experiential view of things—the point at which we participate. The New Covenant emphasizes the basis of our association with, and acceptance by, the Living God. Whether we are speaking of the administration of Divine intent, our personal participation in that intent, or the basis of our acceptance, **Jesus Christ is the heart of the matter**. We are never more pleasing to God in our thinking than when we are focused upon His Son. This text will point out how remarkable this is, for Christ Jesus has been withdrawn from this world. He can no longer be seen or touched with the natural senses. Yet, He remains the focus of the Kingdom. God gives nothing to us apart from Christ. Our access to God and the reception of His benefits are in direct proportion to our faith in an unseen Savior. At the point we become meshed with “*this present evil world*,” the blessings of God begin to wane. Unless the situation is corrected, the individual once blessed will actually come under the curse of God, for “*he that believeth not shall be damned*” (Mk 16:16). It is no wonder, therefore, that the Spirit moves Peter to a profound consideration of our faith in Christ Jesus and the impact it has on our lives. Tragically, I find this kind of emphasis is not harmonious with the thrust of contemporary religion. This is a most sad condition.

WHOM HAVING NOT SEEN YOU LOVE

“Whom having not seen you love . . .”^{NKJV} There is a mentality extant in the modern church that must be cast down. It is that tangible, or corporeal, evidence is superior in the matter of validating the truth of God. This is reflected in an **emphasis** on signs and wonders and physical sensations purporting to attest spiritual blessing. It is also evident in an over evaluation of archeological finds, historicity, and other similar efforts to validate the Word of God. All of this may seem quite innocent, that is not at all the case.

While it is foundational, we need to reaffirm that **faith is the appointed means through which the truth of God is validated to the heart and mind**. Thus it is written, “*Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (Heb 11:1). The word “*substance*” signified a firm guarantee and basis for confidence. It denotes that faith is the “title-deed of things hoped for”^{Moulton}—the thing that brings them to us. The word “*evidence*” means proof or conviction of the reality. Faith itself is the evidence of the reality perceived—it is the proof of its existence and relevance. The New American Bible translates Hebrews 11:1 as follows: “*Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.*” A person who believes requires no further proof than faith itself.

The Spirit points out that the scattered believers had not seen Christ. They were not present when He walked among men. They did not hear Him speak, see His miracles, or touch Him as did the Apostles. Yet, they had “*obtained a faith of equal standing*”^{RSV} with that of the Apostles (2 Pet 1:1). They were as firmly convinced of the reality of Christ as were the Apostles themselves, who spent over three years with Jesus. Of course, even the Apostles did not come into a firm persuasion of the Person of Christ until He had vanished from their vision. It was only then that they took hold of Him in the fullest sense.

Faith brings a profound love for Christ to the believer. This is borne out of the realization that the Son of God “*loved me, and gave Himself for me*” (Gal 2:20). By saying we “*love*” the Lord Jesus, the Spirit lifts religion out of empty ritualism and lifeless routine. Under the Law, the people were motivated by the “*fear of death,*” and thus “*were all their lifetime subject to bondage*” (Heb 2:15). In loving Christ we are motivated to “*keep*” His commandments (John 14:15,21). You may remember that, following His resurrection, the question Jesus asked Peter was “*Do you love me?*”^{NKJV} (John 21:15-17) – not, “*Will you obey me?*” The reason is that loving Christ compels a person to obey Him. This love is so central to the Kingdom that it is written, “*If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha*” (1 Cor 16:22). The NKJV reads, “*If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed. O Lord, come!*”

See the effectiveness of faith! Although Jesus is not seen, yet He is loved, and energetically so. Faith brings a profound and personal acquaintance with the Lord Jesus. The familiarity it produces is greater than what can be attained through the fleshly senses, and it produces a more consistent spiritual life than visual contact with the Lord. **Faith is fueled by the word of God and energized by the Holy Spirit.** It provides us with such an accurate picture of the Lord Jesus that love springs from our hearts, compelling us to live for Him because we love Him.

Throughout the centuries multitudes have maintained a passionate attachment to Jesus, though they have never “*seen*” Him. Such are governed by their love for Jesus, even laying down their lives for Him, and submitting to the abuses of men because of that love. Hardship does not diminish it, nor do harsh afflictions and trials.

All spiritual deficiencies can be traced to a lack of love for Jesus. This love is lacking because faith has been stifled and neglected. If Christ’s love for us motivated Him to lay down His life for us, what will be the impact of our love for Him? It will do no less in us than it did in Him! No requirement given by Jesus is too demanding for those loving Him.

All of this accentuates the power of faith—“*Whom having not seen you love.*” Faith is superior to vision and yields more profound results than seeing Jesus in the flesh. How I long to see such love dominating those who wear the name of Christ.

THOUGH NOW YOU DO NOT SEE HIM

“*. . . Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory . . .*”^{NKJV} The Spirit continues to accentuate the power and effectiveness of faith. Believing does not require overt evidence now. It believes the testimony of the Spirit concerning Christ’s accomplishments and present ministry. It also embraces the promise that we will see Him as He is (1 John 3:1-2). Presently we are “*absent from the Lord*” (2 Cor 5:6). Yet, even though we long to behold Him, our spirits are not dampened, nor are we crushed by the circumstances of life. Behold again the power of faith. Not only does it enable us to love Jesus, we also “*rejoice with joy*”—now!

Notice what is said of joy: “*you rejoice with joy.*” The NASB reads, “*you greatly rejoice with joy.*” The idea is that of being “*filled*” with joy, as the NIV reads. Believing vaults joy into a place of prominence in the heart, where it cannot be suppressed. Thus, this joy is also called “*the joy of faith,*” or “*joy in the faith*” (Phil 1:25). This is the “*fulness of joy*” of which the Psalmist speaks, and it is associated with the very presence of the Lord. “*In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore*” (Psa 16:11).

The Spirit distinguishes this joy from fleshly excitement or exhilaration. This is not a form of fleshly hype. Nor, indeed, is it a mechanical or heartless expression. Although such things are common in the Christian community, they have no place in the Kingdom of God. Both irrational and heartless pleasures are foreign to faith, for faith has a reasoning quality about it. Faith gives the

“*substance*” of Christ to the soul, which results in prevailing joy and gladness. Such rejoicing occurs because of what is perceived.

Notice what else is said of this joy. It is “*unspeakable,*” “*unutterable,*” or “*inexpressible.*” This means the flesh is incapable of fully expressing this joy. It pervades the spirit of the individual possessing it, yet cannot be adequately expressed externally. Joy delivers more to our spirits than can be expressed by the tongue. One ancient proverb says, “He is a poor man who can count his flock.” Here is a joy that does not require laughter nor words, yet can employ them both to the fullest extent possible.

There is a reason for this circumstance. Remember, “*For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power*” (1 Cor 4:20). All of the spiritual qualities produced by faith find their highest expression in something other than speech. This by no means excludes speaking, which is the sanctified means of conveying the truth of the Gospel. The Spirit is here emphasizing the impact of truth upon the human spirit. This inexpressible or unspeakable joy converts into strength, enabling the believer to triumph over the devices of the devil. It is in this sense that Nehemiah said, “*the joy of the LORD is your strength*” (Neh 8:10). Judge in yourself if this is not the case. When the joy of the Lord is being experienced, have you not found yourself more equal to the challenges of life. Are you not better equipped to do the will of the Lord? And, do not your enemies appear less formidable? Thus joy has not been fully uttered, but has gained for you remarkable advantages.

Yet, there is more about this joy that is noteworthy—this joy of faith. It is “*full of glory.*” There is a twofold sense in which this is true. First, this joy brings a personal glory to the believer much like the presence of the Lord brought to the face of Moses (Ex 34:35). It has an immediate effect upon believers, imparting a sort of heavenly glow to them, like that experienced by Stephen (Acts 6:15). Second, such joy brings great honor to the Lord Jesus, drawing attention to His sufficiency and power. Those who “*rejoice in the Lord,*” showing their delight in, and satisfaction with, Him declare that He is good and altogether lovely.

A purported joy that draws attention to the individual is not the joy of this text. This joy is “*full of glory,*” fairly bursting with evidence that the Lord, and the Lord alone, is the source of individual uniqueness. This is not “*fun,*” nor is it frivolous and humorous. This is “*joy in the Holy Spirit*” (Rom 14:17). It was experienced by the mother of our Lord when she received the announcement that she would give birth to the Son of God (Lk 1:47). It always comes when, though we see Him not, yet we believe and trust in Jesus.

RECEIVING THE END OF YOUR FAITH

“*... receiving the end of your faith; the salvation of your souls.*”^{NKJV} Here again the purpose of faith is affirmed. Faith is designed to give us something—to bring Divine benefits to the soul. Faith is the appointed vehicle of blessing. Without it, nothing can be received from God. Faith is not an end of itself, but a means to an end. It is not enough simply to know what to believe. For faith to profit you, it must bring to you what God has appointed. Tragically, this is not common knowledge in the professed church.

Faith has an objective—a end, or goal. It has an appointed purpose or design, something God intends for you to realize through it. This, the Spirit declares, is the “*end of your faith.*” Other versions read, “*the outcome of your faith*”^{NASB}, and “*the goal of your faith*”^{NIV}. This is the conclusion or culmination of faith—what it is intended to do. When Jesus is called the “*Finisher (or Perfecter) of our faith,*” this is the objective He is accomplishing (Heb 12:2). Faith is given to you, but its outcome is being wrought by Christ! That outcome has been revealed, together with the Worker of it.

While the bulk of our salvation is in the future, we are not left without its benefits here and now.

We are presently in the “*receiving*” mode—taking in from the Lord glorious samples of what is to come. Our salvation is not received all at once. We are in the process of “*receiving*.” The word of God knows nothing of a person in fellowship with Jesus (1 Cor 1:9) who is **not** receiving from Him. Taking us from one degree of glory to another, the Holy Spirit is changing us by depositing more of heaven in us, and assisting us in purging from ourselves more of the flesh and its manners (2 Cor 3:18). Where this process is not taking place, faith either is absent altogether, or is waning and will soon depart. We are declared to be “*receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken*” (Heb 12:28). That is another way of affirming the truth of our text.

At once we see where our attention is to be placed: “*the salvation of our souls*.” If we attempt to use our faith for lesser objectives, it will soon dissipate, for it cannot look intently upon any other goal. But why does He say “*the salvation of our souls*”? And why does He say we **are** receiving this rather than that we **have** received it. The “*soul*,” in this text, stands for the whole life of the individual. It is what Jesus referred to when He said, “*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*”^{NKJV} (Mk 8:36-37). We are stewards of our souls, and are solemnly admonished, “*By your patience possess your souls*” (Lk 21:19). And how will that be accomplished? It will be through our faith—our persuasion that God “*is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*” (Heb 11:6). It will be realized when the eyes of our heart are firmly fixed on Jesus, “*the Author and Finisher of our faith*” (Heb 12:2). **Faith will realize its goal if it is kept.**

Notice the present tense of believing and receiving: “*yet believing . . . receiving*.” These are two sides of the same coin. Believing is the heart toward God. Receiving is God toward the heart. Neither of them is a solitary act, nor do they describe a specific event. They are a posture of the soul—something that is continual. The person who **IS** believing **IS** receiving. Those who are **NOT** receiving are **NOT** believing. It is that really that simple.

There is a sense in which we are presently “*saved*” (1 Cor 15:2; Eph 2:5). But that salvation is not yet complete. We are really in Christ, our names are really written in heaven, and we have really been given the Holy Spirit. But the work goes on. Faith has not yet been brought to its intended culmination. We are being brought from “*glory unto glory*,” “*strength to strength*,” and “*faith to faith*” (2 Cor 3:18; Psa 84:7; Rom 1:17). Ever increasing measures of grace are being sent to us that only faith can receive. Faith needs these supplies to flourish, and we need faith to gain the victory.

In all of this, the Lord is bringing glory to His name. He has brought a salvation to us that depends upon Himself, the work of the Spirit, and the intercession of His Son. He intends to translate every part of our person into His presence: spirit, soul, and body. Our faith plugs us into the process, putting us in the “*receiving*” mode.

LESSON #7

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

¹⁰As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, ¹¹seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look."^{NASB} (1 Pet 1:10-12)

INTRODUCTION

The salvation that is enjoyed in Christ Jesus is appropriately called "*so great a salvation*"^{NKJV} (Heb 2:3). It is of such magnitude that it has engaged the minds of holy prophets, inspired of God to tell of its coming. It even is the object of earnest inquiry among the holy angels. The fact that it receives such little attention among men confirms the power of unbelief and the aggression of our adversary the devil. Amidst all of the religious clamor that reigns in the church-world, the Gospel of our salvation has become obscured. However, thanks be unto God, for those who will focus their minds upon the Word of God, the darkness created by misplaced emphases and gross spiritual ignorance is displaced by the glory of God. In that flush of heavenly illumination, faith, hope, and love rise to prominence, the peace of God rules the heart, and we are strengthened with might by God's Spirit in the inner man. This text is about a salvation belonging to US!

AS TO THIS SALVATION . . .

"As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry . . ."^{NASB} The "*salvation*" of reference is the one "*ready to be revealed*" (v 9). It is exceedingly large, and is the reason for both Jesus and the Scriptures. Already, we are tasting of this salvation in the firstfruits sense. Think of what has already been affirmed of "*this salvation*" in this Epistle. (1) It involves God's election. (2) In it the foreknowledge of God is revealed. (3) The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. (4) Empowerment to obedience. (5) The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. (6) The multiplication of grace and peace. (7) God's abundant mercy. (8) The new birth. (9) A living, dominating hope. (10) The power of Christ's resurrection. (11) An incorruptible and undefiled inheritance. (12) An inheritance reserved in heaven for us. (13) The keeping power of God until the salvation is revealed. (14) The trying of our precious faith that it might be found honorable at Jesus' appearing. (15) The ability to love Jesus, Whom we have not seen. (16) Rejoicing with joy unspeakable and full of glory. (17) The reception of the objective of faith. How is it possible for anything to be of a greater magnitude than this!

This is the salvation of reference. It is not simply the remission of sin, or deliverance from the clutches of the devil. These, while precious beyond measure, are not even mentioned in Peter's introduction. He is calling us to an even more powerful consideration--WHY the Lord has delivered us and forgiven us. He is declaring the objective God has in our salvation, and summoning us to contemplate it.

THE GRACE THAT WOULD COME TO YOU. Throughout history, God has raised up holy prophets to prophesy, or foretell, the salvation which we ourselves have tasted. In foretelling this salvation, a single word is used that encapsulates this great provision: "GRACE!"-- "*the GRACE that would come to you.*" They told of a time when God would lavish His love upon His people, bringing them into unparalleled favor and benefit. Jacob prophesied of the coming of "*Shiloh,*" or the peace-making Messiah. The people, he declared, would be "*gathered to Him*" (Gen 49:10). Until Jacob, only two personalities were told of the coming Savior: The devil (Gen 3:15), and Abraham (Gen 12:3). In both cases, God Himself declared the promise. But beginning with Jacob,

MEN were given to prophesy of the coming salvation. Moses said God would “*raise up*” a Prophet to whom the people would listen (Deut 18:15). Isaiah spoke of drawing water out of the wells of salvation (Isa 12:3), and the raising up of a highway of safety through the desert (Isa 35:8). Ezekiel foretold that God would give people a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). Jeremiah spoke of God’s people being saved, dwelling safely, and a Savior identified as “*the Lord OUR righteousness*” (Jer 23:6). Daniel foretold of a kingdom being set up by God that would decimate all other kingdoms (Dan 2:44). Haggai told of the coming of “*the Desire of all nations*” (Hag 2:7), and Malachi wrote of the rising of “*the Sun of righteousness, with healing in His wings*” (Mal 4:2). It was all about “*the GRACE that would come to you!*” This was the **focus** of the message of the prophets.

The magnitude of their message captured the heart of the prophets. They knew of the condition of humanity, and they sensed the greatness of God’s promise concerning what was coming. It is written that they “*made careful search and inquiry*” concerning their inspired message. They did not view it simply as for the people to whom they prophesied. It sounded too good to be limited to a specific people or generation. They sensed it was a “*great salvation*” God was promising through them. The NIV reads *they “searched intently and with the greatest care.”* They scrutinized their prophecies, diligently investigating them. Their search was intent and assiduous not casual and seasonal. Their’s was the proper reaction to any word about this salvation. All other responses are out of order, and are the result of hardness of heart and spiritual blindness

One man has well said, “Peter lingers over the word ‘salvation,’ with something new to say each time.”^{Bigg, Robertson’s Word Pictures} Indeed, it is the Spirit’s intention to cause us to do the same. In our perusal and contemplation of this “*great salvation*” we will experience afresh “*the grace of God,*” which is the driving force behind every aspect of this deliverance.

SEEKING TO KNOW THE PERSON AND THE TIME

“ . . . *seeking to know what Person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow . . .*”^{NASB} The Prophets singled out two aspects of the salvation they foretold. (1) “*The Person,*” and (2) “*The time.*” Both of these whetted their spiritual appetite. Of the Prophets, Jesus also said, “*For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have **desired** to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them*” (Matt 13:17). They set a notable example of inquiry for us all!

The “*salvation*” of which they spoke would center in a Person, and it would come at a certain time. It would not simply be a condition developed in humanity, but the accomplishment of a single Individual. It would not develop over a period of time, being the natural result of improvement in human conduct. Rather, there would come a specific time when the salvation would suddenly be implemented and realized entirely apart from human effort. Who would the Person be? and when would He appear? The inquiry dominated their hearts and minds. Whatever else they were called to say or do, they eventually got back to this consideration: “*what Person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was signifying.*” I fear these Prophets sensed more of the greatness of salvation than many in later generations who profess they have participated in it. How can this be? Jesus Christ was the Person, and “*the fulness of time,*” or “*day of salvation,*” or “*acceptable time,*” or “*acceptable year*” was the time (Gal 4:4; Isa 49:8; 2 Cor 6:2; Isa 61:2; Lk 4:19).

“**THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST.**” Ordinarily, the inspiration of the prophets is traced back to the Holy Spirit (Mk 12:36; 2 Pet 1:21). There is no contradiction here. There are at least two senses in which “*the Spirit of Christ*” is intended. **First**, the **ONLY** reason the Spirit moved upon the Prophets was because of the coming Christ. **Were it not for the promised Deliverer, there would be no need for men to hear from God at all!** **Second**, the very heart of Christ was declared

through the Prophets—how He would suffer, and how He would be glorified. Some notable examples of the unveiling of the coming Savior’s heart should be noted. The 22nd Psalm is a vivid depiction of the Lord’s suffering upon the cross. The humility involved in Jesus coming into the world is expressed in Psalm 40:6-8 (Heb 10:5-9). His desire to proclaim the name of God to His brethren is expressed in Psalm 40:8-10 and Psalm 111:1 (Heb 2:12). The fact that He would live by faith was foretold in Psalm 16:1, 18:2, and Isaiah 12:2 (Heb 1:13). The fact that He would stand at last with His children was affirmed by Isaiah (Isa 8:18; Heb 2:13). These are samples of the heart and mind of Jesus, declared centuries before He came into the world.

“SUFFERINGS and GLORIES.” The essential message of the Prophets is summarized in two views: *“the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.”* **Both of these are Divine appointments!** The *“sufferings of Christ”* are the means to salvation, and the *“glories to follow”* are the result of that salvation. What was required to reconcile men to God was declared, and what would result from reconciliation was also affirmed. The wrath of God would cause the *“sufferings,”* and the grace of God would bring the *“glories.”* The sin of man necessitated the *“sufferings,”* the love of God produced the *“glories.”* The *“glories”* could not come until the *“sufferings”* were accomplished: they *“followed.”* Also, the *“sufferings”* were endured by Christ, but the *“glories”* are administered by Him.

Peter early proclaimed the *“sufferings of Christ”* were a subject of prophetic emphasis (Acts 3:18,24). The 53rd chapter of Isaiah is an excellent example of such prophecies. But what of *“the glory that should follow”*?^{KJV} The wake of salvation would yield a time when *“they shall all be taught of (by) God”* (Isa 2:3; John 6:45). It would induct an era when men would go *“from strength unto strength”* (Psa 84:7; 2 Cor 3:18), and come with *“everlasting joy upon their heads”* (Isa 35:10; Jude 24). Because of the *“sufferings of Christ,”* the redeemed would ultimately be confirmed to His image, being glorified (Job 19:26-27; Psa 17:15; Rom 8:29-30). Praise God for the marvelous grace revealed in His great salvation!

THE IMPACT ON THOSE WHO MINISTERED TO US

“It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.”^{NASB} Precisely when or how this revelation was made to them, we do not know. Just as Paul was not given to understand his *“thorn”* until he had sought three times to have it removed, so the prophets, **after** diligent inquiry, were told *“they were not serving themselves.”* How this devastates the notion that pleasing self is the acme of all human experience!

This does not mean the holy Prophets would not participate in the coming salvation, for Jesus affirmed they would (Lk 13:28). They are included in the vast body of those redeemed by the blood of Christ (Rev 11:18; 18:20,24). Yet, when they were in the body, God showed them their message was intended for later generations, and not, at that time, for themselves. Like Abraham, they lived in anticipation of the fulfillment of the truth shown to them, **AFTER** their own time. How my heart is knit to these holy prophets! They set before us an exemplary standard of what it means to serve the Lord.

Now the Spirit declares that in prophesying, the prophets were *“serving”* us. They spread before us a vast table of rich things—food for the soul that delights the heart. When our blessed Lord expounded things concerning Himself out of the holy Prophets, it caused the hearts of Cleopas and his companion to *“burn within”* them (Lk 24:27-32). Paul affirmed He spoke *“none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles”* (Acts 26:22-23). Let those who spend their time outlining the close of history, the rise

of anarchic governments, and activities in the holy land, consider this! Let them turn their attention to *“the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.”* Then the Prophets will serve them!

If the Prophets were *“serving”* us in their essential message, what possible reason could be adduced for ignoring that message? How is it that anyone would choose the prattling of psychiatrists, economists, or mere motivators to their prophecies of Christ?

The Apostles are referred to as announcing the fulfillment of the Prophet’s message in preaching the Gospel. They did not declare Jesus as “the answer to all of your problems, but the fulfillment of what the Prophets promised. This announcement was made *“by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.”* Their exposition and emphasis were therefore flawless, and could thus be used to implement the promised salvation. Here the uniqueness of the Gospel is seen. It is not the a word outlining the manner in which we are to live, but the announcement of Divine provision—*“salvation.”* It is a message that could only be known or proclaimed in the energy of the Holy Spirit. Any Gospel that does not require the Holy Spirit is no gospel at all. The Holy Spirit, who *“searches”* all things, announces in the Gospel *“The things which God has prepared for those who love Him”* (1 Cor 2:9-10).

The preaching of the fulfillment of the Prophet’s word has elicited the attention of holy angels. There is precious little in the world that draws their attention. They are primarily *“ministers,”* not students (Heb 1:13-14). Yet, in their ministry to the *“heirs,”* they have been exposed to a message that intrigues them. The *“Gospel”* concerns *“things into which angels long to look”*^{NASB}. Too, this Gospel is *“now reported”* to us—not merely to those who have never heard it before. And, if this message has fascinated holy angels, *“who are greater in power and might”* (2 Pet 2:11), how is it that any mortal would not be attracted by the message? What would constrain a person to probe into the writings or words of uninspired men—many of whom are actually God’s enemies—when the holy angels long to inquire into the Gospel? What would compel a person to become an expert in some supposed facet of religion, all the while ignoring its central message? If saints will *“judge angels”* (1 Cor 6:3), it will not doubt be true that holy angels will have something to say to any person who knew of the Gospel, yet did not look intently into it. God is greatly to be praised for a salvation, and the Gospel of it, that has so impacted upon even holy angels.

LESSON #8

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

^{a3}Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ^{NKJV} (1 Pet 1:13)

INTRODUCTION

More and more, the importance of “*focus*” and “*emphasis*” is becoming apparent to me. Distraction is a master stroke of the devil, and it has reached unprecedented proportions in our day. The social and spiritual environment in which we are living has induced a flood of theological diversions. Matters are regularly emphasized that have little or nothing to do with God, Christ, faith, or eternity. In many *Christian* circles, the primary issues are not even mentioned in Scripture, to say nothing of not being emphasized. All of this may appear innocent, and having no impact upon spiritual life. But this is not the case at all. In this text, the Holy Spirit will draw us back into the center of Divine purpose, showing us that our focus is of primary importance. He does not allow us to define the proper center of attention, but firmly directs us to the only one that is acceptable to God. He will point us to “*the end*,” and admonish us to concentrate upon it.

A CHALLENGE TO SPIRITUALLY ACTIVE THINKING

“Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind . . .”^{NKJV} The NASB reads, “*gird your minds for action*,” and the NIV reads “*prepare your minds for action*.” Here, the KJV version is a more literal translation: “*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind*.”

THE LOINS. What are the “*loins*?” The word refers to a spiritual aspect of our persons that parallels nature. Literally, the word means “*hip*,” and was taken to mean the area in which generative power existed^{Thayer}. From the standpoint of lineage, Jesus was the “*fruit*” of David’s “*loins*” (Acts 2:30). The “*sons of Levi*” are said to have come out of “*the loins of Abraham*” (Heb 7:5,10). The “*loins of our mind*,” therefore, refers to **the productive capacity of the mind**—a capacity that is unleashed in spiritual reflection. The “*loins*” are included in spiritual exhortations. “*Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning . . . having your loins girt about with truth . . .*” (Lk 12:35; Eph 6:14).

GIRD UP. This refers to the manner in which those of the East prepared for intense activity. Still those in this section of the world wear long robes, which cover the entire body. In ordinary activities, the robe hangs loose down to their feet. When, however, excessive movement and activity are required, they gather up their loose robes, tucking them under a “*girdle*,” or wide belt, about the waist. The “*girdle*” was not for looks, but was the means of freeing the person for activity. The High Priest’s garments included an intricately woven girdle (Ex 28:8). John the Baptist had a “*leather girdle*” or belt about his waist (Matt 3:4). This part of Paul’s attire is also mentioned (Acts 21:11). The glorified Savior was seen with a golden girdle about His chest (Rev 1:13). Those sent on a mission were to gird their loins so they could move more swiftly and freely (2 Kgs 4:29; 9:1). The spiritual girdle of the believer is declared to be truth: “*girt about with truth*” (Eph 6:14).

The girding of the loins of the mind, therefore, refers to freeing ourselves of distracting influences, and preparing for extensive and productive thought. This is the extreme opposite of drunkenness, revelry, and other forms of activity that render the mind dull and unproductive. When confronting Job, God called him into the arena of intense thought. “*Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me . . . Gird up thy loins now like a man: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me*” (Job 38:3; 40:7). When the Lord sent Jeremiah to recalcitrant Israel He said, “*Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them*” (Jer 1:17).

The metaphor is powerful. Just as those engaged in a long journey were to gird up their loins, so believers are to prepare for a long and arduous journey. The gate through which they enter the race, and the highway on which they travel, are too difficult for the flesh. They will not complete the journey if they are casual and uninvolved. Further, their minds are to be involved in the fullest sense of the word. Every distraction and encumbrance is to be subordinated, and every thought is to be brought “*into captivity to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Cor 10:5). That is involved in girding up the loins of the mind.

Setting, or placing, our affection on things above is also entailed in girding up the loins of our minds. Like a long flowing robe, affections can hinder swift movement and dexterity of spiritual thought. They must be gathered up under the belt of truth, enabling us to develop a proper focus, and hear Him who is speaking from heaven. Many a professed believer is distracted and disjointed in their thinking. They are by no means prepared to think after a godly manner. Thinking is not their strong point, but is the cause of their weakness and spiritual retardation. They have not girded the loins of their mind.

Properly girded, or prepared, your mind can be a source of great comfort and strength. The reason for this is obvious: God has given us much to think about—much to ponder and contemplate. When Paul said to the Philippians, “*Think on these things,*” he was saying “*gird up the loins of your mind.*” Paul confessed the manner of the Kingdom when he wrote, “*with the mind I myself serve the law of God*” (Rom 7:25). But the loins of the mind must be girded, prepared, and readied for involvement in heavenly contemplation.

THE MATTER OF SOBRIETY

“ *keep sober in spirit* ”^{NASB} Here is a word, and concept, that is rarely emphasized in the contemporary church. There is even an approach to the worship of God that imagines entertainment and “*fun*” to have superior value. All such approaches occur because of the blindness of the heart. Thus, the seriousness of the believer’s situation is not known. Not only is the child of God engaged in a journey for which only faith can equip him, but he is opposed by powers of darkness that are staggering in power and influence. Additionally, the believers carry about in them the remnants of the old nature, which are inclined to this condemned world, and shout for their attention. The matter of being “*sober*” addresses this situation. It is not an option, but a requirement.

The word “*sober*” means “self-possessed, without excesses of any kind, moderate and discreet.”^{ISBE} The nature of spiritual life does not allow for being swept up in irrational behavior, or being lulled into complacency. The antithesis of sobriety would be drunkenness, where the individual is made vulnerable to all Satanic devices. In particular, this a spiritual intoxication that causes irrational thought and flawed spiritual vision. Anything that throws the mind out of gear, or moves us toward the realm of pure passion and fleshly excitement contributes to a lack of sobriety, and can be lethal to the soul.

The NASB version adds the words “*in spirit,*” which the spirit of the text supports. The sobriety of which he speaks is in the area of the mind. In this use, being “*sober*” involves disentangling ourselves from the affairs of this world. It is written, “*No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*” (2 Tim 2:4). The whole thrust of this passage has to do with the inner man: 1-anticipating an inheritance reserved for us in heaven (1:4), 2-rejoicing in the midst of trial (1:6-7), 3-believing in One we do not see (1:8), and 4-the salvation of the soul (1:9).

Sobriety is a focused heart, an undistracted mind, and a fixed affection. Often the Spirit admonishes the people of God concerning being sober. **In view of the imminent return of our Lord, believers are admonished,** “*Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be*

sober” (1 Thess 5:3-6). **There are certain protective provisions that cannot be appropriated unless we are sober.** “*But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation*” (1 Thess 5:8). Because of the stealth and aggressiveness of the devil, we are exhorted, “*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour*” (1 Pet 5:8). The soul that is not alert, is erratic and unstable in spiritual thought, or is unfocused in affection, cannot escape the snare of the devil.

There is another aspect to being sober that should be noted. The world, with all of its glitter and allurements, can easily take hold on us if we dabble with it. The smallest taste of sin tends to addict the soul, pulling it into the whirlpool of sin and condemnation. Although “*the pleasures of sin*” are only for a season (Heb 11:25), no person dabbling in them views them in that way. There is such a thing as “*the sin which so easily entangles us*”^{NASB} (Heb 11:1). Believers are very much like a body of people camping in the dark, with wild beasts surrounding their camp, waiting for a convenient moment to attack. Were it not for our spiritual weaponry, it would be an intimidating situation, indeed. Sobriety arms the soul for this situation, keeping us both alert to danger and sensitive to the Lord.

There is no stage of spiritual life in which being sober is not required. Those in the extremities of life in Christ are alike exhorted to be sober. At the threshold of spiritual life, it is required: “*Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded*” (Tit 2:6). Older ladies are to “*teach the young women to be sober*” (Tit 2:4). Those in the twilight of life are also exhorted: “*That the aged men be sober*” (Tit 2:2). For that matter, the grace of God teaches us that “*we should live soberly . . . in this present world*” (Tit 2:12). Rest assured, this will require devoted effort on your part—the girding up of the loins of your mind. If you want to win the prize, you must master the art of being sober, alert, and focused on that prize.

THE FIXATION OF OUR HOPE

“*. . . fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*”^{NASB} The personal involvement of the believer in salvation is apparent throughout Scripture. At no point is there allowance for indifference or a lack of participation in God’s “*great salvation.*” In fact, it is not possible to escape the wrath of God if that salvation is neglected (Heb 2:2-3). Notwithstanding this very clear teaching of Scripture, it is exceedingly rare to find a professing Christian these days that is not living in nearly constant neglect of that salvation. It is an alarming situation.

Here we are summoned to do something with our “*hope.*” Elsewhere we are reminded that God has given us our hope. “*Our Father . . . hath given us . . . good hope through grace*” (2 Thess 2:16). We are stewards of this hope, and are responsible for keeping it. In fact, our identity with Christ requires the maintenance of this hope. “*But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end*” (Heb 3:6). Now, through the Holy Spirit, Peter tells us what to do with our hope.

The various translations of this phrase confirm its centrality in spiritual life. “*Hope to the end*”^{KJV}, “*rest your hope fully*”^{NKJV}, “*fix your hope completely*”^{NASB}. The point here is that the objective of the hope given to you is to appropriate what Jesus will bring with Him when he returns. That is “*the end,*” or objective, of the hope. Our hope will not be a protective helmet unless it is fully set on that objective, making no allowance for any other ultimate goal. Sobriety is required because the things of this world put hope to sleep, and remove it from the throne of the heart. **Hope must be fed by faith, else it will die.** As soon our “*eternal inheritance*” fades from view, and is no longer prominent in our hearts, hope begins to wane. It must be “*fixed,*” or resolutely placed, on what is ahead for us.

The consideration of “*grace*” is always profitable. There is an approach to grace that only associates it with removing our sins and accepting us even though we are unworthy in our own persons. While those are precisely correct, they are by no means a full view of the grace of God. You may recall that “*the grace of God*” was upon our blessed Lord Jesus when He “*grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom*” (Lk 2:40). That grace certainly had nothing whatsoever to do with any sin in Jesus, or any unworthiness found in Him. Now the Spirit points to another time when sin and unworthiness will not be the matter addressed by grace: “*the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.*”^{NIV} It is then that we shall “*be like Him,*” and be seen “*with Him in glory*” (1 John 3:2; Col 3:4). At that time, we will be completely divested of every vestige of sin. We will begin a reign with Jesus that has no terminal point, but continue throughout “*the ages to come*” (Eph 2:7).

The grace of God is not only relevant while we are in this world, surrounded by weakness and hounded by the devil, it is also relevant in glory, where there is no weakness, and the devil cannot be found. Thus it is written, “*that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*”^{NKJV} (Eph 2:7). The grace of God has appeared (Tit 2:1), but not in its fulness! There is yet a grace “*to be brought*” to us at “*the revelation of Jesus Christ.*” Then we will possess the fulness of the salvation of which we now have but the firstfruits—a salvation “*ready to be revealed*” 1 Pet 1:5). So central is the return of our Lord, that Peter has already referred to it four times. Salvation will then be revealed (v 5). Our faith will be found to praise, honor, and glory at that time (v 7). The complete objective of our salvation will then be realized—the salvation of our souls (v 9). And now, we are told of the grace to be brought to us. It will involve a “*crown*” (2 Tim 4:8), an “*inheritance*” (1 Pet 1:4), a “*new name*” (Rev 2:17), and an eternal “*reign*” (2 Tim 2:12). All of this is but an introduction to what is ahead—to what Jesus will bring with Him when He comes again. It is all encapsulated in a single word, “*REWARD*” (Rev 22:12)—the “*grace to be brought to you*” when Jesus is revealed.

Thus the Spirit admonishes us to place our hope on what is ahead—what will only be experienced when Jesus returns. Fixing our hope on the coming grace will stabilize us in this present world, and equip us to withstand assaults from without and within.

LESSON #9

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“¹⁴As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: ¹⁵But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; ¹⁶Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”^{NKJV} (1 Pet 1:14-16)

INTRODUCTION

The Apostles’ doctrine is more than a creed, or set of guidelines. It is Divine reasoning, spoken through holy men, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. While this may appear obvious, it is worthy of consideration. If this is the case, then doctrine is more than a mere response to unique circumstances. It is more of a Divine initiative than the “answer to our problems.” By that I mean it is God’s appointed way of preparing us for the inheritance that is reserved for us, which is everything. A basis postulate of Scripture is the temporary nature of life in this world, and the danger of being drawn into a view of that life that excludes the fundamental nature of life in Christ Jesus. Should we choose to live as though this world were the primary world, we will not be able to avoid being ensnared by the devil, for he is the “*god of this world*” (2 Cor 4:4). Because we are subject to his “*wiles*,” we must continually be reminded and exhorted concerning the difference between our present and former lives. There is a wide and irreconcilable chasm between them!

OBEDIENCE CONTRASTED WITH IGNORANCE

“As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance.” In regeneration, we are “*born of God*” (John 1:13; 1 John 3:9; 4:7). He is the One who put us into Christ (1 Cor 1:30), and raised us from death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). This was a definitive point in time when we became a new creation in Christ Jesus. Of that juncture in time it is written, “*the old has gone, the new has come!*”^{NIV} (2 Cor 5:17). We were, in truth, “*delivered . . . from the domain of darkness, and transferred . . . to the kingdom of His beloved Son*” (Col 1:13). But that was not the end of the matter. Rather, it was the beginning of a new life—a life which is to be maintained and nourished.

All of this may seem obvious, particularly to the uncluttered heart. In spite of that, however, Satan, working through his demonic host, has perpetrated a view of *the Christian life* that presupposes a lack of continued involvement on our part. It is commonly known as “Once saved always saved,” “Once in grace always in grace,” etc. But do not suppose for one moment that these crystallized doctrines exhaust the presentation of this view. There is a frame of mind promoted in the religious world that has this spirit. Myriads of professed believers live as though the doctrine were true, even though they formally deny it. It is staggering to ponder how pervasive this way of thinking has become. Infrequency of sacred gatherings, novel preaching, brevity in all things spiritual, and the attempt to accommodate the things of God to those in love with the world are all evidence of this mind-set.

But the Spirit will not allow us to think in such a loose way. He refers to the manner of our demeanor as “*obedient children*.” He is not referring to our initial obedience, when we received Christ, but to our present manner of life. Our new life was given to us as a stewardship, and we are to do something with it. Children we are, but it had better be “*obedient children*,” else we will be put out of the house. If we imagine that obedience is too difficult, we must remember that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit is in order to our obedience (1 Pet 1:2). Because of the criticality of our obedience, God has provided Divine help for its accomplishment. Jesus is said to be “*the Author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*”^{NKJV} (Heb 5:9). God’s people can become renown for their obedience (Rom 16:19), which is a thought most pleasant to contemplate.

The Spirit now uses most vivid language. Lifting us above Mount Sinai, and an approach to obedience that smacks of Law. He refers to us “*fashioning*,” or “*conforming*,” ourselves. Herein is a marvelous thing—that new life is given to us, and that we are charged with shaping it and forming it into something acceptable to God!

The word “*fashioning*,” or “*conforming*,” comes from **suschematizo, menoí**, which means to shape oneself according to an existing pattern—not one that is self-conceived. Even if we did not have such a definition, the Scriptures bring us to that inescapable conclusion. God’s predestined purpose is that we be “*conformed to the image of His Son*” (Rom 8:29), and that Christ be “*formed*” in us (Gal 4:19). But here is the arresting thing: WE are playing a significant role in that formation. Just as Moses was to “*fashion*” the tabernacle according to the revealed pattern (Ex 26:30; Heb 8:5), so we are to fashion our lives according to the Pattern, who is Christ. Also, just as God endued Bezaleel with the ability to fashion the intricate articles of the tabernacle (Ex 31:2-5), so God has given us “*all things pertaining to life and godliness*” (2 Pet 1:3), and “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor 2:16) to enable us to fulfill this word. An acceptable life cannot be shaped without these.

Notice the manner in which this exhortation is stated: “*NOT according to the former lusts in your ignorance.*” There is an appropriate description of our lives outside of Christ “*IGNORANCE.*” This is not academic ignorance, but a basic ignorance or unfamiliarity with the Living God. It is, in fact, the condition that “*alienated*” us from the “*life of God*” (Eph 4:18). The condition is appropriately described as “*having no hope, and without God in the world*” (Eph 2:12). With zeal, we are to avoid shaping our lives according to the way we thought at that time. The point is this: if we do not labor to evade such a life, the devil, will snare us through his craftiness. We are to be deliberate and spiritual life-builders.

HOLINESS IN EVERYTHING

“*But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.*” Here “*obedience*” is wrapped up in a single word: “*holy.*” He now appeals to our hearts. The One who has called us “*is holy.*” The heart is able to reason on a higher level than the mind. It is able to see associations and arrive at conclusions that can compel certain conduct. The reasoning is this: If you are God’s children, and God is holy, is it not reasonable to conduct ourselves in harmony with His holiness? There is a very vital truth seen here. First, we do not belong to ourselves. By nature we are slaves to either sin or God (Rom 6:17-18; 20-22). If we choose to seek our own fleshly interests, we unavoidably gravitate to sin. However, God, who is holy, has made us His children. He has also given us grace, which “*teaches*” us “*deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,*” and live “*soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*” (Tit 2:11-12). His call and work has made us what we are in Christ Jesus. What possible reason can be adduced for continuing in a state of unholiness? If He is holy, it is totally unreasonable for His children to be unholy in anything or at any time. A lack of holiness contradicts the nature of our Father, and voids a profession of faith. Without it, no one will see the Lord (Heb 13:12).

While obedience does not cause us to become the children of God (that is the result of faith—Gal 3:26), it does differentiate between the children of God and the children of the wicked one. In Israel, God had a people by decree. He distinguished them by loving and choosing them above all other nations (Deut 14:2). Yet, because their natures were not changed, they proved to be “*the degenerate plant of a strange vine*” unto Him (Jer 2:21). While Israel was, indeed, responsible for its failure to be holy, it also was confined to a state of nature, which has no power for holiness. They were not only inexcusable, but helpless. If we were left with nothing more than they possessed, we would be “*degenerate*” as well.

Having said that, there is an astounding number of professing Christians that teach there is no

essential difference between those in Christ Jesus and Israel in the wilderness. If there was no difference, however, the Spirit would not have moved Peter to write these strong words. He does not say, “*Be holy,*” but “*be holy yourselves also in ALL your behavior.*”^{NASB} Under the First Covenant, holiness was largely confined to seasons and ceremonies, summarized as “*meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances*” (Heb 9:10). But this is not the case with those who are “*accepted in the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6). They have been given live “*more abundantly,*” and it pervades all that they say and do. Life in the Son includes “*whatever*” we “*do in word or deed*” (Col 3:17). There is no facet of life where we may step out of our relationship to God, or conduct ourselves as though we were not His children. **To us, there is no such thing as “secular and spiritual.” Rather, the proper divisions are carnal and spiritual, righteousness and unrighteousness, darkness and light, good and evil** (Rom 7:14; 6:18; 2 Cor 6:14; Heb 5:14).

If it is true that God is holy, and that He is our Father, how can any form of unrighteousness be justified? And if it is true that every person will “*give account of himself to God*” (Rom 14:12), what explanation will be offered for being unholy in anything?

This exhortation assumes the remnants of sin remain in us. They are to us what the heathen nations remaining in Canaan were to the Israelites. If you do not drive out those remnants by being holy in all manner of life, they will be “*pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell*” (Num 33:55). Unless that situation is corrected, there is no hope of overcoming the world. Further, we overcome the “*old man*” within us by refusing to give it prominence, and by devoting ourselves to the Lord. Holiness is more what we DO than what we do NOT do. In being holy, or dedicated completely to the Lord in all manner of life, the power of temptation is neutralized. Just as the “*seed of the Kingdom*” cannot grow and be fruitful in unprepared hearts, so the remnants of our fallen nature cannot flourish in a heart that has been made pure, and is kept pure, by the blood of Christ. That, of course, requires your full time commitment.

A WRITTEN MANDATE

“*Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.*” When God moved holy men to write His Word, it was for our “*learning,*” and “*admonition*” (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11). This is why “*all Scripture is profitable*” (2 Tim 3:16). That circumstance is not only applicable to the record of historical events, but to primary affirmations concerning the very nature of God Himself. The text before us is a case in point. Further, the expression “*is written*” denotes permanence, literally meaning it **stands** written, unmoveable. It teaches us not to neglect any portion of Scripture as though it had no relevance to us. Just as surely as the finger of God wrote the Ten Commandments on tables of stone, His Spirit has written all words of Scripture. They are to be trusted as coming from God, and are to be the supporting pillars of our reasoning.

Already the Spirit has reasoned with us, appealing to our renewed minds. But He does not let the matter rest with reason alone. He will ground that reasoning on Divine affirmation—a principle of acceptable and profitable exhortation.

Four times in Scripture God affirms His people are to be holy because of His nature: “*you shall be holy; for I am holy . . . You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy . . . and be holy, for I am the LORD your God . . . you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy*”^{NKJV} (Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:7,26). Here again we see that salvation demands and produces change in the people, not in God. While God’s mind toward us has changed from being our enemy to being our Father, it is not owing to any alternation in His character. It is because we have been changed. Because we remain in an imperfect state, dragging about with us the residue of the Adamic nature, it is necessary to devote ourselves to being holy. Holiness does not result automatically. It is not something to which we attain without effort. It is true we have received everything required for this extensive labor, but without diligence and constancy, the objective of holiness will not be realized.

Our fellowship with God is realized in Christ Jesus. We are accepted in Him and made righteous in Him. Because of God's grace, we have access to Him, and may appropriate mercy and find grace to help in the time of need (Eph 3:12; Heb 4:15-16). However, Divine fellowship is also contingent upon our commitment to being holy. That contingency, it is true, is not required to get into Christ. It is, however, necessary to remain in Him. If we are prone to doubt that this is the case, the Spirit reasons with us. This word is addressed to "*the church of God,*" together "*with all saints.*" "*Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty'*" (2 Cor 1:1; 6:17-18). The seriousness of this expression is self-evident.

An erroneous view of our relationship to God through Christ might affirm God has so fully received us that here can be no improvement on, or decline in, that circumstance. But such reasoning is from the flesh, not the Spirit. God will NOT receive those who continue to maintain unlawful associations with what He has condemned. "*Come out,*" "*be separate,*" "*do not touch*" – are these not to be taken seriously? Is anyone foolhardy enough to believe God will forget these words? This is nothing less than being holy as God is holy. It involves a conscientious effort to walk within the circumference of Divine fellowship. This is done in the awareness that if God does not receive us and dwell in us, we have no hope of dwelling forever with Him. What is more, God will not dwell with us if we are not "*holy.*" Anyone imagining this is not true has been deceived by the devil.

Be assured God has not required something impossible of us. True holiness not only involves doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong, it also includes appropriating the cleansing that is available in Christ Jesus (1 John 1:9). "*IF we sin, we have an Advocate with the Father*" (1 John 2:1). That Advocate, the Lord Jesus Christ, is there to ensure we can maintain the holy state in which we started when we were born again. Being holy as God is holy is only possible because of this circumstance. For this reason, our hearty efforts, though they are not perfect, will not be in vain. Encourage your heart with this truth.

LESSON #10

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear”^{KJV} (1 Pet 1:17)

INTRODUCTION

Acceptable living is always in view of the passing of this world and the coming glory. All of this is seen in the twenty-seven words of this text. It is a text of perspective—written with the objective of God’s great salvation in mind. Any doctrine, or approach to life in Christ, that cannot be concluded with the words of this text cannot be true. These words are always appropriate, whether believers are being taught, rebuked, or admonished. They are foundational in nature, and apply to all times and cultures. As long as the world stands, there will never be a time when the words of this text are not appropriate and needed.

CALLING ON THE FATHER

“And if ye call on the Father . . .” This is a continuation of the thought concerning *“obedient children.”* Children, in this view, call upon their Father: they depend upon Him, and seek for their needs from Him. The word *“call”* is a large one, signifying appealing to the Father, or invoking His name. It involves petitioning for help, appealing to His authority in our behalf, or to solicit or make an earnest request.

Calling upon the Lord is at the very core of spiritual life. It displays the awareness of our total reliance upon the Lord. It is one thing to be dependent upon the Lord. It is quite another thing to know this in our hearts, and conduct our lives in view of that circumstance. Calling upon the Father relates to this awareness, or the spiritual cognition of our situation. Further, there is a joy and confidence that attend this consciousness.

It was in the days of Enos, son of Seth (whom Adam begat in his own image—Gen 5:3), that men began to *“call upon the name of the Lord”* (Gen 4:26). When Elijah boldly confronted the prophets of Baal he said, *“call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD”* (1 Kgs 18:24), thereby petitioning God to work in his behalf. David once delivered a Psalm to Asaph that admonished, *“Give thanks unto the LORD, call upon his name”* (1 Chron 16:8). Joel foretold the era of the New Covenant, when calling upon the name of the Lord would become the norm, and people would be delivered (Joel 2:32; Acts 2:21). In Christ Jesus invoking the name of the Lord has reached its apex, for we call upon *“the Father,”* whose sons we have become by His grace!

An example of calling upon the Father is found in Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians. *“For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man . . .”* (Eph 1:14-17). The petition is in perfect accord with the will of the Father, and is offered by one who has been reconciled to the Father through Jesus Christ.

God is primarily the Father of Jesus Christ, and secondarily the Father of those who are in His Son. Thus we read of *“the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 11:31; Eph 1:3,17; 3:14; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). While this may appear to be a mere technical point with little relevance, that is emphatically not the case. The Spirit will not allow us to consider ourselves related to the Father apart the Lord Jesus Christ.

Calling on the Father, therefore, involves our acceptance in *“the Beloved”* (Eph 1:6). It does not

refer to a crisis type situation, but a manner of life that finds us continually relying upon the One who has begotten us through the Word of truth (James 1:18). This is another view of living by faith (Heb 10:38) and walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25). Faith emphasizes our trust in and reliance upon the Lord. Walking in the Spirit underscores the realm in which we walk. Calling upon the Father accents an acute awareness of our dependency upon the Father.

Our text does not take for granted that we call on the Father, even though that is the nature of the Covenant into which we have been brought. The critical matters of spiritual life are never assumed. Thus the Spirit says, *“IF you call on the Father.”* The NIV says *“Since you call on a Father.”* The word used here (“if”), however, denotes a conditional situation. The exhortation that follows depends upon calling on the Father. It is as though the Spirit said, “If you call on the Father, the conclusion that follows will be obvious.”

All of life is viewed through our relationship to God through Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit. If, at any point, we lose this perspective, we will gravitate immediately to sin. If a sense of our dependency upon the Father wanes, or even leaves us, our natural resources will prove wholly inadequate for living *“soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world”* (Tit 2:12). Just as spiritual life cannot be expressed seasonally, so calling upon the Father is not occasional or periodic. It is a manner of living, a posture of soul. It is to godly living what breathing is to life in the flesh. Faith will keep such calling alive and dominate, thereby equipping us to address living in this world in a proper manner.

HE JUDGES WITHOUT RESPECT OF PERSONS

“ . . . who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work . . . ” Here is an exceedingly important reality: **God is no respecter of persons!** How often this is stated by the Spirit. Peter said, *“Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons”* (Acts 10:34). Moses affirmed, God *“a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward”* (Deut 10:17). Jehosaphat said, *“there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts”* (2 Chron 19:7). Elihu said of God, *“Him that accepteth not the persons of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they all are the work of his hands”* (Job 34:19). Paul wrote, *“For there is no respect of persons with God”* (Rom 2:11). And again, *“God accepteth no man's person”* (Gal 2:6). And again, *“knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with Him”* (Eph 6:9). It should be apparent, therefore, that this is a vital part of our perception of God.

In saying God is no respecter of persons, we are to understand we cannot gain His respect or appropriate His help by offering Him a gift or a reward (Deut 10:17; 2 Chron 19:7). Neither, indeed, does He have a higher regard for the rich than for the poor (Job 45:15). He is not impressed by appearance, but looks upon the heart (1 Sam 16:7). He looks for truth within (Jer 5:3), and where it is not found His favor cannot be gained. This is the trait to which the Spirit refers when He says, *“But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth”* (Rom 2:2). He regards no man because of the office he holds, or because of the possessions he has, or because of his achievements in this world. In fact, *“God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God”* (Lk 16:15). He knows nothing of the elaborate distinctions among men that are fostered by the contemporary church.

The conclusion to which this should lead is simply this: our devotion to God must not be merely external. His requirements are not only addressed to our words and actions, but to the thoughts and meditations of our hearts, our preferences, and our expectations. The word *“persons”* denotes natural, **not** spiritual, distinction. The Father has a high regard for the new creation—that which is born of Him. He looks to the person who is properly aligned with Him. As it is written, *“but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word”* (Isa

66:2).

When, therefore, it is written that God has no “*respect*” or regard for persons, it does NOT mean He views everyone the same, or that He has the same degree of love for all. Such a thought is utterly absurd, though entertained by not a few. Enoch towered above those of His generation, for “*he had this testimony, that he pleased God*” (Heb 11:5). Of all the people in the world, “*Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord*” (Gen 6:8). Abraham stood out among his peers, and even all generations, being called “*the Friend of God*” (James 2:23). God said of Israel, “*You only have I known of all the families of the earth*” (Amos 3:2). John is referred to as “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*” (John 20:2; 21:20). Of those in Christ it is written, “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people*”^{NKJV} (1 Pet 2:9).

Having no respect of persons, our God “*judges according to each one's work.*” He is not speaking of works with merit, but here views them as the incontrovertible evidence of what a person really is. As Jesus said, “*Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them*” (Matt 7:17-20). Character erupts in words and deeds. Thus, in judging according to our works, God is actually judging in strict accord with our character, which is evidenced by our works. The knowledge, rather persuasion, of this will compel us to “*put off concerning the former conversation the old man,*” and “*put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*” (Eph 4:22-24). You can count on the “*new man*” to produce the type of works that will stand up under the judgment of God.

SOJOURNING WITH FEAR

“*. . . pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*” Here is a perspective unique to those possessing faith: we are “*sojourning here.*” The believer is in the world what Israel was in the wilderness—sojourning. Even in the best of worldly circumstances, the trusting one who calls upon the Father is what Abraham was in Canaan: “*By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Heb 11:9-10). Like Joseph in Egypt, even though believers may experience temporary exaltation, yet they really do not belong there. That is why Joseph, believing the people would be delivered from Egypt, “*gave commandment concerning his bones.*” It is written, “*And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence*” (Gen 50:25; Heb 11:22). He knew, although second only to Pharaoh, he did not really belong in Egypt.

A sojourner is a stranger—a foreigner from another land. That is why Abraham confessed to the sons of Heth, “*I am a stranger and a sojourner with you*” (Gen 34:4). Much later, after Moses had left Egypt, he also dwelt in a land for which he was not well suited. It is said of that time that he “*was a stranger in the land of Madian*” (Acts 7:29). In the thirty-ninth Psalm, David poured out his soul to God, pleading for an answer to his prayer on the basis of his strangership, in the world. “*For I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were*” (Psa 39:12). Indeed, faith plucks us from at-home-ness in this world. Whether we are able to adequately articulate it or not, our hearts confirm to us that we do not belong to this world. We no longer are harmonious with its fashion or order.

There is a time-limit attached to our sojourning—praise the Lord! That is why such comfort is found in the expression “*the TIME of your sojourning.*” As those who lived by faith before us, we are truly “*strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11). As soon as we are consonant with this world, and think it to be our primary residence, we are under the influence of

the wicked one. He is “*the god of this world,*” blinding all who chose to settle down in that realm (2 Cor 4:4).

And why is it we are admonished to spend the time of our pilgrimage “*in fear.*” It is because we are under the watchful eye of our Father, and He has no respect of persons. He will not divorce who we are from what we do—for that would be respecting our persons. The fear of reference does not drive us from God, or move us to cry for the rocks and mountains to hide us. Rather, it keeps us alert for the intrusions of the enemy. It constrains us to mortify our members that are upon the earth (Col 3:5), and deny the flesh its desire for expression. The necessity of this posture is declared in Romans 11:20, and is declared in view of the fact we are not presently in our homeland. “*Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee*” (Rom 11:20-21). In unbelieving Israel we see an example of those who left the land of bondage, but never entered into Canaan. It was en route to the promised land that they “*fell,*” succumbing to the trial of the wilderness (Heb 3:17). With this in mind we are also admonished, “*Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12).

The novice might object that “*it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure*” (Phil 2:13), and consequently there is no need to “*fear.*” However, God does not work “*to will and to do*” in those who are at home in this world. The reason He does not is because they are His enemies. Therefore it is written, “*friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*” (James 4:4). Such knowledge will produce “*reverence and godly fear*” (Heb 12:28) that will move us to think more of our real home than our temporary one. Your sojourn is only for a “*little while,*” and will conclude with a triumphant transfer to the presence of the Lord. Being a “*stranger and a pilgrim*” will not last long. Spend the time properly!

LESSON #11

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“ . . . knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”^{NKJV} (1 Pet 1:17)

INTRODUCTION

The life of faith is lived with an acute awareness of two realities: (1) The old life from which we have been delivered, and (2) The new life into which we have come. There is no aspect of our life in Christ that does not require a consistent understanding of these two realities. Just as the old life from which we were delivered had no good in it, so the new life into which we have come has no evil in it. It is truly an epoch of spiritual life when we experience some degree of clarity concerning these things. Life in the flesh was totally profitless. As Jesus said, *“the flesh profits nothing”* (John 6:63). Our former lives were characterized by ignorance (Eph 4:18), hopelessness (Eph 2:12), death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1), foolishness (Tit 3:3a), and deception (Tit 3:3b). Enslaved and dominated by Satan, we had no power to extricate ourselves from the dilemma. Nor, indeed, were we even aware that we were in a dilemma. The Spirit will now recall to our hearts the means through which we have been delivered. He will rivet the truth to our conscience with great power, bringing strength to the heart that calls upon, and trusts in, the name of the Lord.

NOT REDEEMED WITH CORRUPTIBLE THINGS

“ . . . knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold.”^{NKJV}
The concept of redemption is central in Scripture. It was developed under the Law, and that with a great amount of detail. The word *“redeem”* is a very weighty one. Some of its English synonyms make this clear: recover, reclaim, salvage, ransom, and rescue. As used in Scripture, the word *“redeem”* denotes setting at liberty—being set free. But there is even more to the matter than that. The Word of God established that redemption involved a cost. It was not simply the result of a decision—a price had to be paid. That price had to be a satisfactory one, else the freedom would not be realized.

There are several conditions postulated by the need for redemption. (1) The one requiring redemption was being controlled by another. He was in bondage, and was unable to get free from it. (2) The one being redeemed was helpless—unable to resolve the predicament himself. He was too weak and too poor to pay the cost of ransom. (3) There was an established cost by which the enslaved one could be redeemed and set free.

The language of our text is rooted in Old Covenant types and shadows. The very first use of the word *“redeem”* is found in Genesis 48:16. There Jacob, upon being restored to his son Joseph, confessed he had been *“redeemed from all evil.”* The second use of the word is found in Exodus 6:6, where the Spirit began to reveal the involvements of redemption. *“I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will **redeem** you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments.”* Following their deliverance from Egypt, the Israelites sang on the banks of the Red Sea, *“Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed”* (Ex 15:13). Thus we are introduced to the nature of redemption.

Under the Levitical law, considerable was said about redemption. If, for example, a poor man had to sell some of his possessions, his brother could redeem, or buy back, those possessions (Lev 25:25). If a person, because of poverty, sold himself to someone as a slave, *“one of his brothers may redeem him”* (Lev 25:49). Unclean beasts, houses, and fields were also redeemed with money (Lev 27:13,15,19).

Under the Law, the firstborn of everything belonged to the Lord. *“Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD”* (Num 3:13). However, there was a special stipulation concerning the firstborn of man and that of unclean beasts. *“the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem”* (Num 18:15). The redemption price, in such a case, was a monetary one, and was to be paid according to the *“shekel of the sanctuary”* (Num 18:16). In all of these cases, redemption was an ordained formality, designed to acquaint men with the ways of the Lord. The Spirit now tells us of a redemption that was more than a mere formality. Further, it was a redemption so costly it could be paid by no one but Deity.

Throughout the Holy Scriptures, the Spirit reminds us that we have been brought into a covenant that is *“better”* than the Old Covenant, which was *“concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation”*^{NKJV} (Heb 9:10). Our redemption was not according to *“the shekel of the sanctuary”* of old. Nor, indeed, was it a lifeless formality.

When the Spirit says our redemption was not with *“corruptible things, as silver and gold,”* He confirms it is not a temporal redemption. In fact, we are pointedly told it is an *“eternal redemption,”* obtained for us by the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 9:12). Our deliverance is not a momentary one, but an everlasting one. The price paid by the Lord Jesus is not a temporal one, but a once-for-all price that has forever satisfied the Lord.

By saying *“you WERE not redeemed with . . .”* the Spirit emphasizes that the price has already been paid in full. The Gospel, from this view, is the announcement of the ransom payment that brings liberty to the prisoners. God be praised for that effective redemption! All glory to God that it has already been paid, and is available to all who will believe.

THE LIVES FROM WHICH WE WERE REDEEMED

“ . . . from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers . . .” The candor with which the Spirit speaks concerning our former lives is worth pondering. Remember, He is reasoning with us concerning the girding up of the loins of our minds, hoping unto the end, and being holy (1:13-16). Here, the reason adduced for engaging in such arduous activity is that we have been *“redeemed”* from our *“vain conversation”*^{KJV}, *“aimless conduct”*^{NKJV}, and *“futile ways”*^{NASB}. We are powerfully reminded that apart from Christ Jesus our lives were pointless, aimless, and futile—from every point of view. Until a suitable ransom was found, **we were locked, so to speak, into vanity.** This condition was expressed by Solomon, who spoke of life WITHOUT a Savior in mind. *“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun? . . . I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit”* (Eccl 1:2,14). Outside of Christ, that is an absolutely precise statement. In Christ, there is not a syllable of it that is true. It is in the Scriptures to substantiate the utter futility of life that is not lived in the Son.

If we will always think of our former lives as *“vain”* and *“aimless,”* we will not be prone to return to that way of living. At this point, we must learn from the Israelites. Once they were delivered from Egyptian bondage, they did not cease to think of that former life. It is written of them, *“And in their hearts they turned back to Egypt”* (Acts 7:39). Facing the hardships of the wilderness they reasoned, *“For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness”* (Ex 14:11-12). And again, *“Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger”* (Ex 16:3). In the stress of the wilderness, they soon forgot the manner of their former lives.

Thus, the Spirit reasons with those who are “*sojourning*” in this hostile world. He knows the difficulties of life are an area in which Satan aggressively tempts the saints. You will remember how he tempted Jesus in the wilderness after He was hungry (Matt 4). You may be sure he will also use the difficult times of life to try and make inroads into your life.

By saying we have been “*redeemed*” from our former pointless lives, the Spirit means we have been liberated from enslavement to vanity. Through the blood of Christ, God has freed us from the shackles of the old life. As Paul said elsewhere, “*Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live*” (Rom 8:12). We are obligated to the One who ransomed us, not our former lives. If any believer is lured back into sin, it is not because he was obligated to do so, or could not help but do it. No matter how strong the lure of the old life, in Christ we are able to deny its demands upon us! The ransom that was paid is very real and totally effective—both for God and for us.

Notice the phrase, “*received by tradition from your fathers.*” Here, the emphasis is placed upon “*tradition*” rather than “*the fathers.*” For the Jews to whom Peter wrote, this was the whole of their former religion. For the Gentiles, it is the concept of life we entertained. Both of them were traditional views, with no spiritual life in them. The meaning is that a form of religion was passed along—a way of approach to God that was primarily ritualistic, bringing neither cleansing of the conscience nor vibrant faith and hope. That condition is what made living futile.

Paul made a critical distinction in the godly life of Timothy, tracing it back to his mother and grandmother. The point, however, was not the traditions they passed along, but “*the unfeigned faith . . . which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice*” (2 Tim 1:5). A merely traditional religion that advocates coming to God and living by procedure is pointless and vain. We have been redeemed from that kind of living, and are under no obligation to live in a pointless manner. We are free to live unto God!

THE PRECIOUS REDEMPTION PRICE

“*. . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.*” Here the “*Lamb of God*” is distinguished from all other sacrifices, and His blood is differentiated from all other sacrificial blood. Peter frequently uses the word “*precious,*” confirming the value of what we have in Christ Jesus. Among the things that are “*precious,*” he includes (1) faith—1:7; 2 Pet 1:1, (2) the blood of Jesus—1:19, (3) Jesus Himself—2:4,6,7, and (4) the promises of God (2 Pet 1:4). The word “*precious*” means valuable, of great worth, highly respected, priceless, and rare. In the case of Christ’s blood, it is precious by nature, and precious in perception. It is possible for something to be precious, yet be perceived as worthless—like an unrecognized priceless painting. Also, something can be perceived as precious, yet be worthless—like fool’s gold. The blood of Christ is precious before God, and precious with those receiving Christ. The blood of Christ also surpasses all other values in reality. Once seen for what it is, it also is so considered in the believing heart.

The comparison of “*the precious blood of Christ*” is made with “*corruptible things, as silver and of gold.*” Additionally, a comparison is now made with all of the sacrificial animals offered under the Law. Christ’s blood was “*precious*” because of the value of His life—for the blood stands for the life (Lev 17:11). Here was a life lived in this world that was totally “*without sin*”—even though Jesus was “*tempted in all points like as we are*” (Heb 4:15). For this reason, His blood obtained redemptive value. It was to the spiritual economy what the “*shekel of the sanctuary*” was to the Levitical economy.

The spirit makes much of the perfection of Jesus—the “*Lamb of God.*” He is “*is holy, harmless,*

undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb 7:26). He “*did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth*” (1 Pe 2:22). “*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin*” (2 Cor 5:21). He was made known to take away our sins, “*and in Him is no sin*” (1 John 3:5). Truly, He was “*without spot!*” Thus, He fulfilled the Lamb-type that was instituted under Law (Num 19:2; 28:3,9,11; 29:17,26). There was no moral blemish upon Jesus, no taint of character, no inherent weakness. As He Himself confessed, “*the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me*” (John 14:30).

Here a most challenging thought is presented to us. As powerful as God is, He required a satisfactory sacrifice before any person could be released from the power of sin and the dominion of the devil. Even the hoary tradition of the Jewish fathers could not rescue men from the vanity and futility of life. Neither, indeed, could the rescue be accomplished by a deliverance like that of Israel from Egypt—something overt and through Divine force. The extrication of men from sin was in order that they might have fellowship with God, and dwell forever in His house. That meant there had to be a total elimination of their past, in order that they might be made “*the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21). God could not overlook iniquity, or push it aside with a word (Ex 34:7). He had to have a righteous foundation for the acceptance of humanity—one that did not require Him to act in contradiction of His holy and pure character.

The “*precious blood of Christ*” provided that foundation. It provided the Father a ransom price that allowed the prison doors not only to be unlocked, but carried away like Samson carried away the “*doors of the gate of Gaza*” (Judges 16:3). It is upon the basis of Christ’s vicarious death—and only upon that basis—that God has liberated us from the shackles of our past lives.

This truth is stated several different ways in Scripture, confirming it is a foundation for both our salvation and our reasoning about life. The “*blood of Christ*” effected our justification (Rom 5:9), forgiveness (Eph 1:7), nearness to God (Eph 2:13), peace with God (Col 1:20), purging of our conscience (Heb 9:14), boldness to enter God’s presence (Heb 10:19), and continual cleansing from sin (1 John 1:7). **Faith will never take us beyond a need for and access to the blood of Christ!** There is no point in living by faith where it is not needed or it is not precious. The redemption that was paid once, is still effective.

LESSON #12

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.”^{KJV} (1 Pet 1:20-21)

INTRODUCTION

There is a manner in which the Spirit speaks—a fashion in which Scripture is written. There is always a Divine perspective set forth—always the heavenly view of things. For this reason, statements are made in passing that are enormous in both content and implication. The Spirit will not always elaborate on these remarkable statements, but will simply state them, reaffirming their truth to our hearts. These expressions consistently reflect the character of God, the need of man, and the nature of salvation. They make perfect sense to faith, and tend to bolster believers, reassuring them their faith is not in vain. We have such an expression in this text. In a few short words, the Spirit spans a period from before the world was created until now. He states pivotal, or central, realities upon which our faith rests. He tells us the Object of both faith and hope, and declares the foundation upon which they both rest. This manner of speaking is totally foreign to the flesh, but gloriously refreshing to the “*new man*.” It will again be affirmed that the entirety of our salvation is founded upon Divine activity and provision.

THE LAMB WAS FOREORDAINED

“Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world . . .”^{KJV} Men often ask questions like this: “Did God know Adam would sin?” “IF He knew, why did He make man in the first place?” “What if man did NOT sin—would he have lived forever with God?” . . . etc., etc. Care must be taken not to get caught up in such queries, for they are all “*foolish and unlearned questions*,” which are to be avoided (2 Tim 2:23). They may well appeal to our curiosity, but they will yield absolutely no benefit to our souls. They are actually a diversion from saving truth. Our text speaks with ultimate reality in mind.

The word “*Who*” refers to our Lord in the capacity of a “*Lamb*” to be offered for the sins of the world. He was “*foreordained*,” or selected in advance, to be the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world. The word may also be translated “*foreknown*,” and is in the NASB. The same word (foreknown) is used in Romans 8:29 regarding those who are to be confirmed to the image of God’s Son. It is also used in Romans 11:2, where it is affirmed God has not cast away His people whom He “*foreknew*.”

This word means more than simply seeing what is going to happen. That ought to be obvious from the text itself. It was not simply that God knew ahead of time that Jesus was going to be a sacrificial Lamb. He is the One that made the appointment. He sent the Son, commanded the Son, and delivered Him up. Our text is speaking of an appointment, a predetermination, and something that was cast, as it were, in stone. Other versions emphasize this. “*He was chosen before the creation of the world*” (NIV). “*He was destined before the foundation of the world*” (RSV, NRSV). **Divine foreknowledge is what causes the event to take place.** Thus it is written, “*Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*” (Acts 2:23).

Jesus was appointed to be the Lamb slain, **before** the creation of the world. Thus we read of “*the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev 13:8). The phrase “*foundation of the world*” is frequently mentioned in Scripture—and always in relation to Divine determinations. Jesus spoke of things kept secret “*from the foundation of the world*” (Matt 13:35). He also said the saved would receive a kingdom prepared for them “*from the foundation of the world*” (Matt 25:34). Our

Lord spoke of the relationship He had with the Father “*before the foundation of the world*” (John 17:24). The Spirit affirms we were chosen in Christ “*before the foundation of the world*” (Eph 1:4). The book of Hebrews asserts “*the works were finished from the foundation of the world*” (Heb 4:3). The Revelation refers to those whose names were “*not written in book of life from the foundation of the world*” (rev 17:8). This is, then, a significant spiritual expression.

Our text is affirming that before the world was ever created, the role of Jesus was firmly established. Salvation is not a reaction of God to an unexpected dilemma, but the purpose of God, determined before the earth was made or man placed upon it. Thus, the New Covenant, sanctified by the blood of this Lamb, was not a change in plans, but the implementation of an “*eternal purpose.*”

Some have asked, “Did God know Adam would sin?” The question is a foolish one, for the Lamb who was to deal with sin, was selected and commissioned “*before the foundation of the world.*” Seeing beforehand the transgression of man, the Lord made provision for it before He made the man. He did not abandon the creation of man because it was all part of an “*eternal purpose*” to unveil to principalities and powers His great wisdom (Eph 3:10). He would place someone a little lower than the angels in a realm accessed by the one who caused angels to fall, and gloriously bring that weak creature all the way to glory by means of a Lamb slain. Is that not wisdom?

And why does the Spirit speak in this manner? Because our faith needs to be anchored in eternity, and not in time. We need to know our salvation has come from everlasting, just as surely as our Savior (Mic 5:2). If the provision was made for sin before it actually occurred, you should not hesitate to avail yourself of the remedy. Such a salvation, because of its predetermined Lamb, is accessible for all time.

THE LAMB WAS MANIFESTED FOR OUR SAKE

“*. . . but was manifest in these last times for you . . .*”^{KJV} The nature of salvation requires that Divine determinations pertaining to it must, at some point, be made known. Not only must the appointed “*Lamb*” be accepted by God, He must also be “*received*” by men. The Spirit has told us that the appointment of the Lamb was made before the world was created. Of course, there is no possible way we could have known or deduced this on our own. Behind this statement is the assumption that the entrance of the Lamb into the world, and the manifestation of Him to men, had to come in a timely manner. Thus it is written, “*But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons*”^{NIV} (Gal 4:4-5). The Law had done its work, defining and convincing men of sin (Rom 3:20; Gal 3:24). The realm was now ready for a Savior, and thus He was “*manifested,*” or made known.

Note that the time of the revelation of the Lamb is called “*these last times.*” It is as though He said, **Everything prior to the Lamb was but a preparation for Him. Once the Lamb was revealed, the final stage of time began.** He is the reason for the existence of the world, “*For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and FOR HIM*” (Col 1:16). Once, therefore, He had been revealed, the defiled realm entered into its final period.

The manifestation of the Lamb was for our sake. Literally, the phrase reads, “because of you,” or “on account of you.” The idea is that we required this provision. Sin had carried us so far from God, there was no hope of finding our way back—or of being accepted by the offended God if we imagined we could negotiate our way back to Him through our own wisdom. Even above this, the expression reveals the love of God—His intense desire to redeem His “*offspring.*” The New Living

Translation captures this sense of the text by reading, “*And He did this for you.*” If, under the law, holy men could say, “*The LORD hath been mindful of us*” (Psa 115:12), what can be said of those who have been given to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? When Mary, the mother of our Lord, learned of the coming Savior, she responded for us all when she said, “*For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden*” (Lk 1:48). In this statement the Spirit also emphasizes that, although the fathers experienced mercy from God, more of it has been made known, and poured out upon, those in Christ Jesus. We are under a superior covenant, with superior promises, and superior benefits.

However, more is implied here than the personal entrance of Christ into the world, and the accomplishment of His appointed mission. That was but an introductory revelation, recognized by relatively few people. The manifestation of the Lamb also comes through the proclamation of the Gospel, which is the point being made by the Spirit (1:10-12). The “*Gospel of Christ*” is also an unveiling of His Person. It openly affirms what was secretly determined before the foundation of the world. There is an important facet of the Gospel to be seen here. Primarily, the Gospel is the announcement of what God determined. It proclaims what God sent Jesus to do (Acts 3:26; Gal 4:5; 1 John 4:9,10,14). Those who preach the Gospel within the context of earthly needs and crises are not wise. It is to be preached with Divine intention in mind. Then it will be accompanied with power, and will accomplish that whereunto it is sent (Isa 55:11).

Actually, there are three manifestations of the Lamb of God. One has already occurred. One is now occurring. One is scheduled to occur. In Christ’s birth, life, and death, the preordained Lamb was manifested. Through the Gospel of Christ, the preordained Lamb is being made known. In the last day, the glorified Lamb, who is the “*King of kings and Lord of lords,*” will be unveiled in all of His glory (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 6:16; 14:10). Those who avail themselves of the Lamb revealed in the Gospel, will be joyful when He is unveiled in all of His glory. That appearance will be for them also (Heb 9:28)!

THE ROLE OF JESUS IN OUR FAITH

“Who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.”^{KJV} Once again, the magnitude of truth that is compressed into a short statement is staggering. Here the entire matter of salvation is summarized in a most provocative manner. **¹How we believe in God, ²why God raised and glorified Christ, and ³His purpose for us, are all declared in this verse.**

BY HIM DO BELIEVE IN GOD. Believing in God is not ordinarily considered to be a significant achievement. In the churches with which I have been affiliated, this is generally taken for granted, with minimal value assigned to it. But you will not come to that conclusion from this passage! Believing in God is NOT insignificant. Those in Christ Jesus are described as “*they which have believed in God*” (Tit 3:8). It is said of Abraham, “*And he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness*” (Gen 15:6).

Here the Spirit states that we believe in God “*BY HIM (Jesus).*” This is precisely the point Jesus made in the eleventh chapter of Matthew: “*no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him . . . Take my yoke upon you and learn from me*”^{NIV} (11:27-29). You cannot trust in a God you do not know, and you cannot know God except through the ministry of His Son. Jesus is fundamentally the Expositor of God *Himself*. He comes to give us “*an understanding, that we may know Him that is true*” (1 John 5:20). Believing in God is not primarily intellectual. It is “*with the heart*” that we believe (Rom 10:10). Acknowledging that God exists, or that there is one God, is not believing in God. Even the demons have this type of knowledge (James 2:19). To “*believe in God*” is to depend on Him, rely upon Him, and entrust the keeping of our souls to Him (1 Pet 4:19). How is it that such total reliance is possible? It is “*by Him,*” the Lord

Jesus! He is the Author and Finisher of our faith, and we have learned to believe from Him.

THAT RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD AND GAVE HIM GLORY. The Spirit will not allow us to think of God merely as the Creator, or as a Supreme Being—although He is surely both. In order to receive the blessing of God, He must be seen in relation to His Son. The God in which Jesus enables us to believe is the One who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory. A dead Christ is a powerless One—thus God raised Him from the dead. Without being Himself glorified, He could not bring us to glory—therefore God glorified Him. Jesus is no longer in the region of the dead—in any sense. Neither, indeed, does He possess any element of weakness. He has been exalted to the place required to call us, shepherd us, and cause us to stand and triumph. It is God that has placed Him in this exalted position (Phil 2:9; Eph 1:20-23; 1 Pet 3:22). This is the God that will cause all Christ's enemies to become His footstool: "*Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool*" (Psa 110:1; Heb 1:13). Although there are "*gods many and lords many*" (1 Cor 8:5), this is the God in whom Jesus has brought us to believe and trust. Emphatically, it is "*through Him*" that you "*believe in God.*"

FAITH AND HOPE IN GOD. And WHY did God raise Jesus from the dead and give Him glory? "*So that your faith and hope are in God.*"^{NKJV} Thus you have at least three things required for you to have faith in God and hope in Him. ¹The teaching of Jesus. ²The resurrection of Jesus from the dead. ³The glorification of the Son of God following His atoning death and justifying resurrection. Not only does God give us faith (Rom 12:3) and hope (2 Thess 2:16), He has provided a just and unwavering foundation for them both! Here is the totality of salvation: ***faith and hope in God!*** Faith has to do with NOW, and hope has to do with THEN. Faith overcomes this world, and hope appropriates the next one—and both of them are "***in God.***"

In view of this stated objective, no person can be content with "*little faith*" (Matt 6:30) or a failure to "*hope to the end*" (1 Pet 1:13). Nor, indeed, can any say these are beyond their reach. Jesus has been appointed to enable us to believe in God. Nothing related to death can negate His ministry, for God raised Him from the realm of the dead. All of heaven supports Him in His ministry, because there is where He has been glorified.

LESSON #13

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“²²Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: ²³Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.”^{KJV} (1 Pet 1:22-23)

INTRODUCTION

The value of continual the affirmation of the cause and nature of our status in Christ Jesus cannot be overstated. Never must we allow an emphasis of duty to supplant a stress upon the Gospel of Christ and our acceptance in Him. There is a reason for this approach to Apostolic doctrine. We have the treasure of the “*knowledge of the glory of God*” in “*earthen vessels*” (2 Cor 4:6-7). That circumstance introduces a liability. How well it is stated in Galatians 5:17. “*For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.*”^{NKJV} This inner warfare is what requires the repeated affirmation of Who Christ is, what He has accomplished, and what we have become in Him. Your own heart will confirm the truth of this. Great inner strength is realized by being exposed to these inspired utterances of central matters. Effective exhortation, as we will see in this passage, is founded upon the truth of our salvation. We are never placed at a disadvantage by hearing how and why we were born again. The ultimate disadvantage occurs when these things slip from us.

OBEYING THE TRUTH AND PURIFYING THE SOUL

“²²Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit. . .”^{KJV} The Spirit is always express in what He declares. The matter of our purification exhibits this manner. On the one hand, it is God Himself who has “*purified*” our hearts (Acts 15:9). Jesus gave Himself for us, that He might “*purify*” us (Tit 2:14). The truth of the matter is that there can be no purification of the individual apart from a Divine working. That, however, does not imply that we play no part in the purification. It is true, we do not provide a basis, or reason, for the purification. However, we are involved.

The word “*purify*” means “*made holy*.” In this case, it is the result of the removal of impurity, or defilement. Sin so contaminated us, in our entire persons, that we needed to be “*washed*” (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:11;), “*cleansed*” (Eph 5:26; 1 John 1:9), and “*purged*” (Heb 1:3; 2 Pet 1:9). By saying “*your souls*” have been purified, the Spirit means the totality of our lives. Our intellect, emotion, and will had to be “*purified*.” Sin caused us to think wrong, react wrong, and have wrong desires. That circumstance required total cleansing.

Our text says that we “*have purified our souls*.” While God Himself accomplishes the cleansing, we entered into the process. Thus it is written, “*purify your hearts, you double-minded*” (James 4:8). Again, “*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit*” (1 Cor 7:1). Thus, the language should not be strange to us. We purify, or cleanse, ourselves by taking hold of the cleansing God has provided in Jesus Christ. We must never forget that the grace of God cannot be held in a contaminated vessel or by a defiled heart. Purity IS essential.

This purification was accomplished through “*obeying the truth*.” This is a most intriguing expression., Notice, the Spirit does not say “*obeying a commandment*,” but “*obeying the truth*.” Elsewhere the Scriptures speak of those who “*obey not the truth*” (Rom 2:8). The Galatians, after coming into Christ, were soundly rebuked for falling into a condition described as “*not obey the truth*” (Gal 3:1). Obeying the truth is aligning ourselves with the truth, and conforming to it in

every way possible.

In this text, the reference is doubtless to our initial entrance into Christ. *“The truth”* is thus the Gospel of Christ, and our obedience to it took place in our baptism. The sixth chapter of Romans provides extensive teaching on this matter. There, baptism is related to being put into Christ’s death, being buried and raised with Him, the crucifixion of the *“old man,”* the destruction of the *“body of sin,”* being *“freed from sin,”* and being made *“alive unto God”* (6:3-11). The reality of these things is summarized in this marvelous statement: *“But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you”* (6:17). The phrase *“the doctrine”* equates to *“the truth”* in our text. In summary, the doctrine was the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. The *“form”* of that doctrine was baptism, in which we die, are buried, and are raised with Christ. There is where our acceptance began.

But lest we become too enamored of obedience itself, or approach it from Mount Sinai, the text adds, *“through the Spirit.”* That is, our obedience was rendered in the power of the Holy Spirit. You will recall this Epistle started by telling us we were sanctified by the Holy Spirit *“unto,”* or in order to, *“obedience”* (1:2). The Holy Spirit is the Divine Enabler, given to us, among other things, to facilitate obedience. It is through Him, for example, that we *“mortify the deeds of the body”*—another view of purifying ourselves (Rom 8:13).

It stands to reason, therefore, that those who *“quench”* or *“grieve”* the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30), by that very action, make obedience impossible. The Spirit will lead us into a life of obedience to the truth. Not only will the commandments be kept, and not be grievous to us, our lives will conform to the Gospel of Christ. An affinity with the world will be denied, and *“Christ will be magnified”* in us, whether by life or death (Phil 1:20).

In these few words, we have been urged to live in view of our cleansing. The truth is seen as something to be obeyed as well as believed. The Holy Spirit is to our obedience what our spirit is to our body. He is the great Leader and Animator of God’s people.

UNFEIGNED LOVE OF THE BRETHREN

“ . . . unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently.”^{KJV} Being washed is not an end of itself: it is in order to something. Obeying the truth is also not the end of the matter: it leads to something else. Here is a statement that appears simplistic, yet is unusually profound. Our purification through obedience and by the Spirit is in order to *“unfeigned love of the brethren.”* The word *“unfeigned”* is used four times in the KJV, and refers to *“love”* and *“faith”* (2 Cor 6:6; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 1:5; 1 Pet 1:22). The same root word is used in James 3:17, which refers to *“wisdom”* that is *“without hypocrisy.”*

The word *“unfeigned”* means *“without hypocrisy, genuine, or sincere.”* It is the opposite of an actor, pretending to be something he is not. Under the Law, Israel conducted themselves in a manner precisely the opposite of our text. Jesus said of that unbelieving generation, *“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”* (Matt 15:8-9; Isa 29:13). Their profession was *“feigned,”* or pretended. It was a false appearance, and produced a false impression. They said they loved God, but they did not. They said they worshiped Him, but they did not.

An unfeigned love of the brethren of Jesus is one that is real. It is not an institutional love, centered around sectarian interests and men’s persons. A feigned love is one that cannot hold up under conflict, and maintains *“self”* as the primary person. But *“unfeigned love of the brethren”* reveals a preference for them (Rom 12:10). They are seen as the *“workmanship”* of God, and the household of Jesus.

If men were asked to state a fundamental objective for purity and obedience, few would even contemplate the “*unfeigned,*” or unpretended, “*love of the brethren.*” Among other things, this confirms believers can only be loved by other believers: those who have been washed and are obedient. As soon as defilement occurs, the brethren begin to lose their value, and self becomes dominant. “*The brethren*” are our companions to glory. They are the people who alone have received of Christ’s “*fulness*” (John 1:16). They are the only ones in the world who have been given the Holy Spirit of God (Gal 4:6). They alone have their names “*written in heaven*” (Heb 12:23). Every single spiritual gift has been deposited with them for the purpose of edification (1 Cor 12:7). There can only be one reason why such people are not loved, preferred, and given honor: SIN!

Our love for “*the brethren*” is not to be casual. Not only is it to be sincere and without hypocrisy, it is to be “*fervent.*” That fervency is not to be assumed, nor are we to sit by passively until some strange ability descends upon us from above. We are to “*see that*” we love one another “*fervently,*” throwing ourselves into the work. That means there are contrary influences that will attempt to draw us away from “*brotherly love.*”

Just what is loving “*fervently?*” It is seeking to please our brethren by edifying them (Rom 15:2). It is by “*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints*” (Eph 6:18). We love the brethren fervently when we “*do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10). Such love includes “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching*” (Heb 10:25).

Above all, we love them fervently by clinging to the Lord “*with purpose of heart*” (Acts 11:23), keeping ourselves “*in the love of God*” (Jude 21), and running “*with patience the race that is set before us*” (Heb 12:1). In so conducting our lives, we become a resource to the saints of God, bringing strength, joy, and spiritual advantage to them. God has “*begotten us again*” not only to obtain an inheritance ourselves, but to assist His people in doing the same. He has placed us in the body according to His own will, giving us gifts that will help our brethren. We love them fervently when we employ these gifts for their good.

BORN AGAIN OF INCORRUPTIBLE SEED

“*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.*”^{KJV} How frequently the Holy Spirit reminds us that we have been born again! God has “*hath begotten us again*” (1 Pet 1:3). We have been born “*of God*” (John 1:13). He begat us “*of His own will*” (James 1:18), and we are “*His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus*” (Eph 2:10). We are, indeed, a “*new creation,*” and are thus being conformed to the “*image of His Son*” (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:29). We have been raised from death in trespasses and sins, and put into the Kingdom of God’s Son (Eph 2:1-2; Col 1:13). It is not that believers OUGHT to be born again: they ARE born again: “*BEING born again.*” That is their present status, and it is evidence of God’s own work.

The means through which we are “*born again*” is the incorruptible “*word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.*” The Word of God is to the spiritual birth what male gamete (“*corruptible seed*”) is to fleshly birth. It is what causes the new birth to take place. Whatever may be said of the human spirit, free will, or Divine qualities related to being in the image of God, they are all lifeless until awakened by the Word of the Living God! Among other things, this confirms the total futility of the flesh. As our blessed Lord said, “*The flesh profiteth nothing*” (John 6:63). If the flesh could not remove our sin, induce a spiritual awakening, bring us to God, or cause us to be born again, why should we listen to it, or obey its lusts? As it is written, “*Therefore do not let sin reign in your*

mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts" (Rom 6:12).

Because the Word of God "*liveth and abideth forever,*" it never loses its power, or fails to effectively work in us. As it is written, "*the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe*" (1 Thess 2:13). If one is prone to doubt the effectiveness of God's Word, consider what it did in you through the Gospel. That blessed message enabled you to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that you might be saved. When you embraced that Word, you experienced the very power of God. Your allegiance to sin was brought to an abrupt conclusion. You saw Christ as you had never seen Him before. Hope was kindled in your heart, together with a fervent desire to please the Lord. You saw your sins were forgiven, and that you could approach confidently unto God. That Word has NOT lost its power!

The reasoning of the Spirit is strong, pulling upon the cords of the heart, and drawing us more fully into the will of the Lord. He has urged us to a fervent, or ardent, love of the brethren. We are not to allow anything to come between us and those who have been joined to the Lord. If we question that this is possible, ponder the condition in which we find ourselves. Our souls have been purified by US obeying the truth. We did not do it in our own strength, but "*through the Spirit.*" Further, the very work of the Spirit leads to the love of the brethren, making it apparent to the heart and joyful to the soul.

We DO have the capacity to zealously love the people of God! We have been born again, recreated in Christ Jesus. Our "*new man,*" or the part of us that is born again, is "*renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him*" (Col 3:10). That renewed part of us is addressed in this text. While our minds are involved, they are secondary. It is our heart and spirit that have been made new, and that is the part that can respond to this summons. The "*brethren*" have the same new nature you have! They are in the same body, and possess the same Spirit. The "*brethren*" are motivated by the same "*hope*" you hold, and worship and serve the same Lord. Both their faith and their baptism are the same as yours, and the same God dwells within them (Eph 4:4-6). So extend yourself! Love them fervently, consistently, and faithfully. Thus you will honor the Lord who bought you.

LESSON #14

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“²⁴For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:²⁵But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.”^{KJV} (1 Pet 1:24-25)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout Scripture there is a consistent proclamation of two pillars of sound reasoning. (1) That man has fallen by transgression, is in a state of deterioration, and needs to be rescued. (2) That God is eternal and unchanging, and thus is to be trusted implicitly. In view of this, man’s wisdom has been repudiated by God, and is not to be trusted. Too, what the Lord has said is as stable as God Himself, and must be trusted. The necessity of the new birth and living by faith is comprehended in the light of these two things: (1) The instability of man, and (2) The eternity of God. At no point are these things to be taken for granted. Nor, indeed, are we to imagine that they can be kept in our hearts and minds without considerable effort. If, at any point, these realities are renounced, or even become blurred in our understanding, we immediately become vulnerable to the devil. Temptation obtains greater power when we ascribe too much glory to man, or too little glory to God. The larger man looms, the more enticing sin becomes. The smaller God and His Word appear in our understanding, the more powerful Satan becomes. Our perception of both God and humanity must be correct, and we must fight to maintain that correctness.

THE PREVAILING TRAIT OF THE FLESH

“For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.”^{KJV} The word “flesh” refers to humanity, as distinguished from Deity, and the holy angels. In Noah’s day, when the earth was filled with sin, God observed, ***“all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth”*** (Gen 6:12). In the flood, ***“all flesh”*** died—man and beast alike (Gen 7:21). Something of significance is to be seen here. Prior to the fall, man was called ***“a living soul”*** (Gen 2:7), bearing the very ***“likeness of God”*** (Gen 5:1). After the fall, man was predominately known as ***“flesh,”*** with a closer kinship to the beasts of the earth than to the God from whose glory he fell.

The phrase, ***“all flesh is grass,”*** is taken from the Prophets. It is intended to give us a proper view of humanity apart from God. This is the word that God put in Isaiah’s mouth, and was spoken against the backdrop of the promised salvation of God. The fortieth chapter of Isaiah is beautiful in tone and powerful in message. It speaks of the accomplishment of warfare and the pardon of iniquity (v 1-2). The coming of John the Baptist is foretold, a ***“voice”*** crying out in the ***“wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God”*** (v 3). A spiritual renovation was to take place that boggles the mind. ***“Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain”*** (v 4). The glory of the Lord was going to be revealed, and ***“all flesh”*** would see it together. God has said it, and it would come to pass (v 5).

The one speaking to Isaiah then told him, ***“CRY,”*** or ***“CRY OUT,”*** or ***“PREACH,”*** or ***“LOUDLY ANNOUNCE!”*** But Isaiah does not know what to shout—what message to loudly proclaim. Showing the nature of faith to rely upon the Lord, he said, ***“What shall I cry?”*** It is then that God gave him the message to which Peter refers. ***“All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever”*** (v 6-8). This is not intended to describe only man’s external part, but his soul as well. **Everything about man apart from Christ is in a state of**

disintegration.

But notice the way Peter begins this reference: “*FOR all flesh is grass . . .*” The word “*for*” explains the necessity for the new birth. “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, FOR . . .*” The NKJV reads, “*BECAUSE all flesh is grass.*” There is no hope of those in a state of irreversible decline obtaining eternal life—they must be born again! Unless men are extricated from the course of nature, they will not be saved.

But this is not merely a general statement, or one that is confined to only the worst of our race. “*The glory of man,*” or man in his best and most refined natural state, is nothing more than “*the flower of the grass,*” that quickly fades and falls to the ground. The most notable achievements of unregenerate men are nothing more than a flower that remains beautiful for a while, but soon fads and falls to the ground in the blast of the winter wind. It is for this reason that we should never make our boast in men (1 Cor 3:21).

There are at least two reasons why “*The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away.*” First, sin has introduced a state which will conclude in death. Second, the closer unregenerate man comes to God, the more he withers. That is the point made to Isaiah. “*The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: BECAUSE the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it*” (Isa 40:7). By this we conclude that even though men appear to be something, when they stand before God, their “*comeliness*” is “*turned*” into “*corruption,*” and they retain “*no strength*” (Dan 10:8). No personality will ever stand before the Living God and retain a high estimation of their own worth or accomplishments. The Spirit of God does not need to speak to flesh, but only to “*blow upon it*” for this to become most evident. We have reason to thank God for the privilege of hearing the Gospel and being born again. In our new birth we are delivered from the realm of withering! Praise the Lord!

THE NATURE OF THE WORD OF GOD

“*But the Word of the Lord endureth for ever.*”^{*KJV} Notice that the “*Word of the Lord*” is compared to “*all flesh.*” It is as though God will not stoop to compare His Person with that of mankind. This is the “*Word,*” or “*incorruptible seed,*” through which we were “*born again*” (1:23). It is the “*seed*” to which John referred, when the Spirit moved him to write, “*Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God*” (1 John 3:9).

The reasoning of the Spirit is very powerful. While some men have dared to speculate on precisely what the word of God is (Scripture, prophecies, etc.), we are here told of its nature: it “*endures for ever.*” The point is that permanency can only be found in God, and God can only be found through His word—the revelation of His Person, mind, and purpose. Through, or by means of, that eternal Word man, who by nature is fading and degenerating, becomes a partaker of “*eternal life.*” He is brought to a state in Jesus where he “*will never die*” (John 11:26). Is that not a marvelous consideration?

The eternity of God’s Word is frequently emphasized in Scripture. His word is “*settled in heaven*” where change and decay cannot enter (Psa 119:89). Emphasizing the stability of Divine utterance, Jesus said of the Law (which was not God’s most lofty message), “*And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail*” (Luke 16:17). If that is true of the Law, ended by Christ as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), what must be said of the promises, or of the Gospel of Christ? Jesus said His words “*shall not pass away*” (Matt 24:35).

More is involved here than the mere existence of the Word. Its endurance involves its fulfillment as well. “*For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the*

sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa 55:10-11). An “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11) cannot be implemented by a passing or temporal word.

When it comes right down to it, people either trust in men or God—in what men have said, or in what God has said. The blessing of God is pronounced on those who have a proper view of His word. “*Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word*” (Isa 66:1-2). God urges those who tremble at His Word to listen to it (Isa 66:5). In Ezra’s day, the people “*trembled at the words of the God of Israel*” (Ezra 9:4). David stood in “*awe*” of God’s Word (Psa 119:161). When Habakkuk heard the word of the Lord, his “*Body trembled,*” his “*lips quivered,*” and “*rotteness*” entered into his bones (Hab 3:16). When Saul of Tarsus confronted the living Christ, he asked what he should do, with “*trembling*” and astonishment (Acts 9:6). When the Philippian jailor asked what he should do to be saved, he did so with “*trembling*” (Acts 16:29). For that matter, believers are to “*work out*” their own salvation “*with fear and trembling*” (Phil 2:12).

All of this confirms the arresting nature of the Word of God. It only remains for the individual to be convinced it is the word of Almighty God. Once that takes place, an acute awareness of the abiding nature of His Word will register upon the heart. It is at precisely that point that men begin to “*live by every word of God*” (Lk 4:4).

In view of this, who, then, would choose to rely upon men rather than God? Let every child of God put to death the tendency to elevate human opinion, trust in human accomplishments, or neglect the Word of the Living God. Everything about the natural man fades, and everything about the Word contributes to life and growth. There is nothing about the Word that is transitory, and nothing about nature that is eternal. Faith will invariably cast us upon the Word of God.

THE WORD THAT COMES BY THE GOSPEL

“*And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*”^{KJV} There is a certain progression in the word of God. It is not found in the nature of the word itself, as though it gradually improves. Rather, the advancement is found in the message of the Word. Further, what is declared at the last is an extension of what was said at the first. For example, the last words of the Bible are the final extension of the first promise of the Bible. “*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen*” (Rev 22:21), is the ultimate fulfillment of “*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*” (Gen 3:15). This character of God’s word is confirmed in our text.

The culminating word of God for men is found in “*the Gospel.*” There His purpose is most fully delineated. The righteousness of God is made known in the Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:17). The Gentiles are made fellow heirs “*by the Gospel*” (Eph 3:6). “*Life and immortality*” are “*brought to light through the Gospel*” (2 Tim 1:10). The “*fulness*” of God’s blessing is brought through the Gospel (Rom 15:29). Here, in the Gospel, “*your salvation*” is most fully detailed (Eph 1:13).

When the Spirit says “*This is the word which by the Gospel is preached unto you,*” He means the Gospel is an “*everlasting Gospel*” (Rev 14:6). It represents the ultimate Divine purpose, the highest calling, and the most wonderful news. God had this Gospel in mind when He announced the ultimate overthrow of Satan (Gen 3:15). It was in His mind when He promised to bless the world through Abraham (Gen 22:18). The Law was given in prospect of the Gospel, to prepare men to receive Christ (Gal 3:24). This was the burden of the Prophet’s message (1 Pet 1:12).

Notice, it is **preaching** that has brought the powerful Gospel near to us. The Spirit does not say the Word is by the Gospel *explained* to us, but “*preached*” to us. Faith has, indeed, come to us “*by hearing*” (Rom 10:17). One of the most poignant affirmations of this is found in the tenth chapter of Romans. “*But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach*” (Rom 10:6-8). Ponder the strength of that declaration. Through a proclaimed word, both faith and righteousness were brought to us! Peter adds that we were “*born again*” through the word proclaimed in the Gospel.

How significantly this contrasts with the Law, which detailed what men should do, but gave them no power to do it. The Law was not the “*Seed*” of the Kingdom, but the Gospel is! If you want new births to occur, and spiritual stability as well, then the Gospel must be preached, for it is the ultimate message of God to men. **There is no higher or more relevant word than the Gospel of Christ!** Without it, the Prophet’s become meaningless and the Law useless.

All that we need for obtaining and maintaining spiritual life is found within the message of the Gospel. It is what sheds light upon both the Law and the Prophets. The knowledge of God is procured and maintained through the Gospel. There is no point in the newness of life where the Gospel Christ is no longer needed, or ceases to be the focus of thought. God will not walk with us apart from Christ Jesus, and Christ Jesus can only be properly known through the Gospel of Christ.

I trust that you have learned the high worth of the “*glorious Gospel of the blessed God*” (1 Tim 1:11). We have been “*begotten . . . through the Gospel*” (1 Cor 4:15), and “*stand*” firm within it (1 Cor 15:1). As we “*keep*” it in “*memory*,” we will be “*saved*” by it (1 Cor 15:3). Spiritual life will never take you far from the Gospel. Again and again, the Holy Spirit will bring you back to the message of the Gospel, firming up your grasp of the truth, enhancing your knowledge of God, and providing good reason to live by faith. The most powerful incentives are found in the Gospel, as well as the greatest provisions.

LESSON #15

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

¹Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, ²As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: ³If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."^{KJV} (1 Pet 2:1-3)

INTRODUCTION

The Apostolic writings are set within the context of spiritual warfare. The Holy Spirit moved holy men to write to those engaged in a profound spiritual battle, whether the recipients were aware of it or not. If Eve had to contend with the devil while she was in a state of moral perfection, and in the undefiled Garden of Eden, you may be sure we will not be excluded from confronting him. If our ancient parents were not insulated against Satan's influence, what would lead any thinking person to assume we are. The "*holy Scriptures*" assume the presence of two competing influences, and the necessity of yielding to one while rejecting the other. From the standpoint of their nature, the influences are good and evil. Viewed from the perspective of their origin, they are the Holy Spirit and our adversary the devil. No word from God to men in this world fails to take this circumstance into consideration. For example, sin is never addressed as though there was no righteousness. And, righteousness is never spoken of as though there was no contention with sin. These are seen with refreshing clarity in the text set before us.

RID YOURSELVES OF THESE THINGS

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings."^{KJV} Even though we have been born again, as powerfully stated in the first chapter (1:3,23), we still must contend with the remnants of our fallen nature. This is a point heavily debated in the religious world. Men tend to adopt extreme positions on this matter, thereby oversimplifying our condition. Some assume that once we are in Christ, we have nothing to fear from sin. Such assume we are safely locked into salvation, with no danger of ever departing from it. Others, supposing the whole situation is hopeless, see no reason to extend themselves to avoid sin. They imagine we must sin, and can in no way avoid involvements in it. Both views are distorted, and neither have their origin in the Word of God. Further, they both encourage men to minimize sin.

The situation of those who are born again is much like that of Israel coming into Canaan. The land belonged to them by Divine appointment. Yet, when they arrived, people were found in the land that were hostile to the Israelites. These enemies were not willing to let Israel have the land, and thus fought against them. Of this situation the Lord said, "*And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it . . . But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell*" (Num 33:53-55).

The Spirit mentions five unacceptable expressions that are to be discarded. (1) **Malice**. This is the desire to hurt or harm someone, and proceeds from spiritual malignancy. It involves an "I'll get you back" attitude, where self interests are sought above those of God. Synonyms for "malice" include ill-will, wickedness, dislike, hatefulness, and depravity. (2) **Guile**. This is deceitfulness, trickery, craft, and subtlety. Misrepresentation and fraud are part of guile. (3) **Hypocrisies**. This is pretension, acting contrary to one's real character. In Scripture, hypocrisy involves keeping wickedness within while pretending to be righteous on the outside. (4) **Envies**. This is fleshly jealousy that covets what another has, and is discontent with what God has given. This causes dissatisfaction over the good fortune of another, wanting all of the glory for self. (5) **Evil speakings**. This is backbiting, or defaming the character of another. It is causing reproach, or

encouraging one person to despise another one. It is an evil report, slander, and disparagement.

No child of God is exempt from these dreadful traits. They are a part of the “*old man*,” that is to be “*put off*” (Eph 4:22; Col 3:8-9). These are inherent to “*the flesh*,” the part of us that came from Adam. They cannot be cultured away, or put off by religious discipline. Further, the exhortation to put them off does not imply they were having free expression in the believers. This is not a rebuke, but an exhortation. The picture is of hostile forces trying to gain the upper hand. We put them off by rejecting their advancement, and refusing to allow them to penetrate our hearts. When these transgressions are committed, they are to be confessed and abandoned (1 John 1:9). They are put off when, like a spiritual leech, they attempt to fasten themselves upon our hearts and minds. It is when we are tempted with them that we are to put them off—all of them.

The list presented is not as thorough as that of Galatians 5:19-21. But it is enough to confirm to our hearts the tremendous aggregation of uncleanness that proceeds from the flesh. Lest we be lulled to sleep by the world’s philosophy, we are to consider that “*no good thing*” dwells in our “*flesh*”—the natural part of us (Rom 7:18). In salvation, no part of the “*natural man*” is salvaged. We are given a new nature—a new basic part. It is completely incompatible with the old nature, with which we struggle while we remain in the body. It is only to the degree that we “*put off all these*,” that the advantages of salvation are experienced. Just as Israel could not occupy portions of the land still dominated by the enemy, so the segment of our persons still ruled by the flesh cannot be controlled by the Spirit. Putting off these things is not accomplished casually, or with minimal effort. But wherever a hearty attempt of faith is expended, God will make sure it is accomplished.

CONDUCTING OURSELVES AS NEWBORN BABES

“As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”^{KJV} The manner of spiritual life is declared in this admonition. In nature, newborn life deteriorates, finally concluding in death. But this is not the case with spiritual life. The “*newness of life*” does not wane, but actually increases. This is the meaning of being changed “*from glory unto glory*” (2 Cor 3:18), going from “*strength to strength*” (Psa 84:7), and being “*renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created*” us (Col 3:10). We are not only saved by the “*washing of regeneration*,” but the “*renewing of the Holy Spirit*” as well (Tit 3:5). Where spiritual sensitivity and commitment are lacking, it is not because one’s life in Christ is waning or diminishing. It is because it is leaving, unable to reside where faith is not maintained. Spiritual life without spiritual food is impossible.

The term “*as newborn babes*” does not suggest a return to infantile spiritual life. God forbid the entertainment of such an absurdity. Rather, it speaks of a trait acquired when we were born again—an insatiable appetite for the Word of God. When a person in Christ for some time is dominated by the same type of appetite obtained when they first came into Christ, it will be stronger, more sustained, and more productive. Just as surely as an adult with an aggressive appetite consumes larger portions of food than a newborn infant, so the mature in Christ ingest larger portions of truth than at the beginning. Suffice it to say, this type of appetite is exceedingly rare. But such a condition ought not to be. It is wrong!

The word “*desire*,” as you might expect, is by no means casual or relaxed. It means yearn for, greatly desire, intensely crave, and long after. It is the same desire as expressed by our Lord in the words “*hunger and thirst*” (Matt 5:6). This is a desire that refuses to be ignored, and does not go away. It demands satisfaction, and like a squalling hungry baby, refuses to be put off with miserable substitutes. It is the type of desire expressed in the 119th Psalm: “*Behold, I have longed after thy precepts*” (v 40).

And what is it that we are to desire with the aggressiveness of a “*newborn babe*?” It is the “*sincere milk of the Word*.” Other versions read “*the pure milk of the Word*”^{NKJV}, and “*pure*

spiritual milk.”^{NIV.RSV} The idea is that of undiluted milk—not watered down. This is **NOT** about spiritual rudiments, as though some parts of the Word were “milk,” and others were “meat”—a misconception altogether too common in the churches. The Word is itself the “milk,” not some portion of it. When the Scriptures speak of “milk” and “meat,” they are not referring to the Scriptures themselves, or to doctrines contained in them. In both instances where this language is used (1 Corinthians 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12), the point is not the use of certain portions of Scripture. Rather, “milk” has to do with conduct, while “meat” has to do with understanding and perceiving the implications of the Word—i.e., being able to reason upon the basis of what the Word affirms (Heb 5:13-14).

It is remarkable how few professed believers are able to reason upon the Scriptures. They have been fed a diet of diluted milk. What they know of the Word has been mixed with human opinion and religious tradition, thereby neutralizing the effectiveness of Scripture. I cannot overemphasize the importance of anchoring our thinking to a “thus saith the Lord.” If God does not say it like men say it, it is simply not to be said.

The reason for craving the pure Word of God is that this is the Divinely appointed means of sustaining spiritual life: “*that ye may grow thereby.*” Moses said it, and Jesus confirmed it: “*man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God*” (Deut 8:3; Lk 4:4). Those who are fundamentally ignorant of God’s Word, and lack a hearty appetite for it, are almost dead, if not dead altogether. There is no such thing as spiritual life without a hearty appetite for God’s Word that refuses to be denied.

We begin our life in Christ with this type of appetite, but it must be sustained by our faith. A religion that allows for the neglect of, and a lack of acquaintance with, the good Word of God, is the enemy of the soul. It is the offspring of hell, and is nurtured by doctrines of demons. There is no way to state the case too strongly.

IF YOU REALLY HAVE TASTED

“*If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.*”^{KJV} It is the manner of the Spirit to make us responsible for examining ourselves, to see whether we are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5). There is no suggestion that the readers have **NOT** tasted that the Lord is gracious. Rather, the people are called into active involvement with the Lord, for there is where true benefit is realized (1 Cor 1:9). The Lord will not allow us to assume all of the points upon which our salvation depends. Our condition must be confirmed by our faith.

The word “*taste*” is a strong and central word in Scripture. It does not mean to merely sample, but to experience or partake of the reality “*tasted.*” Such tasting is actually an aspect of spiritual knowledge, whereby familiarity and acquaintance with the Lord are realized. It includes the idea of perception, enjoyment, and certainty—knowing the Lord. Just as Jonathan’s eyes were “*enlightened*” when he tasted the wilderness honey (1 Sam 14:27), so we are refreshed and renewed when we taste that the Lord is gracious.

Down through the ages, the clarion call has been sounded: “*O taste and see that the LORD is good*” (Psa 34:8). See if He is not everything He is declared to be! “*Put Me to the test,*” God cried to Israel (Mal 3:10). Now that a redemption price has been satisfactorily paid, the only way to “*taste*” or experience the Lord is through Jesus Christ. There is no experience of God apart from Him.

But note the particular subject of taste: “*the Lord is gracious.*” The familiarity with God produced by fellowship with Christ yields a prevailing conviction that God is gracious! That is what make His words “*sweeter than honey*” to our mouths (Psa 119:103). “*Gracious*” is also an exceedingly large word. Included in it are excellence, easy, pleasant, superior, and suitable.^{Strong’s}

This means **great satisfaction** is realized in the experience of Divine blessing and fellowship. We “*never thirst*” again (John 4:14), looking elsewhere for gratification. It also means His demands upon us **do not chaff against our souls**, or weaken us in the way. Thus Jesus said, “*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*” (Matt 11:30). None of the Lord’s dealings with His children are inconsiderate. No requirement given by Him puts us at a disadvantage. There is nothing about Divine affiliation that is unpleasant, creating reluctance and making life tedious. He is “*gracious.*”

Admittedly, there are imaginations extant among professed believers that do not present the Lord in this way. For this reason, men do not give themselves fully to the pursuit of knowing Him (Phil 3:7-14). Regardless of their profession, they are not convinced such aggressiveness is worth the effort, and therefore they do not throw themselves into it. That is the reason why religious men are casual, disinterested, and uninvolved. They have not “*tasted that the Lord is gracious.*” That is why they are so easily diverted from spiritual pursuits. It is why sin has such a grip upon them.

No person will be able to put off the vices of the flesh or desire the pure milk of the Word until they have “*tasted that the Lord is gracious.*” If anyone finds it too difficult to deny worldly lusts, or pursue spiritual life, then they must eat the bread of life again! Let them run to the fountain of the water of life and drink again! Let them come to Jesus again, and take His yoke upon them. They will soon find themselves able to do what our text requires. Their taste of the Lord, and their perception of His graciousness, will impart “*health*” to their spiritual body and “*nourishment*” to their spiritual bones (Prov 3:8). And, if they have, indeed, “*tasted that the Lord is gracious,*” let them maintain the sweetness of Divine affiliation in their hearts. Let them nourish a hearty appetite for the Word of the Lord, feeding upon its rich morsels, and delighting themselves in Him. Thus will their Lord grant them the desires of their heart (Psa 37:4).

LESSON #16

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

^{4:2}To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ⁵Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."^{KJV} (1 Pet 2:4-5)

INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ is preeminently the means through Whom we come to God. Nothing dissociated from God, or unaffiliated with Jesus, is of any significance. Christ is also the exclusive means through Whom the purpose of God is being fulfilled, or brought to its culmination. Spiritual life does not begin without Jesus, and cannot be sustained without immediate involvement with Him. Every aspect of salvation is determined by the Son of God, beginning and ending with Him. Nothing is accomplished for God until men first come to His Son. The direction and extent of their life are established there, as they are enrolled in the purpose of Almighty God. This text will show us that the work of God is ongoing—that an entire order of life is being maintained through Christ that brings continual honor and glory to God. Connection with Jesus brings living and vibrant activity toward God among the saints—both individually and collectively. There are continual acceptable offerings rising to God from among the sons of men through the Son.

COMING AS TO A LIVING STONE

^{4:2}To whom coming, as unto a Living Stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious."^{KJV} Other versions read, "*Coming to Him*"^{NKJV} . . . "*As you come to Him*"^{NIV} . . . "*And coming to Him*"^{NASB} . . . "*Come to Him*"^{NRSV}. **The point is that we are presently in the process of coming to Jesus.** Ordinarily, coming to Jesus is associated with our initial deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. Thus men would reason that once being in Christ, we would no longer "*come*" to Him. But this is not the case. While we are, indeed, "*in Christ*" and Christ is "*in*" us, the work is by no means completed. We are still coming to Him—making our way to deeper and more productive involvement with our glorious Savior. Elsewhere we are challenged, "*Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing His reproach*" (Heb 13:13). There remain areas of our lives that must yet be lived out in fellowship with the Son, and thus we are still coming to Him. Only those who imagine they have no need to come to Jesus cease to do so. Just as Jesus coming into the world involved an extensive effort (*humbling Himself, entering the world, increasing in wisdom, being tempted, ministering, dying, and raising from the dead*), so extensive and prolonged effort is found on our part as we come to Him.

And how is it that we come to Him? What is the capacity in which He is eagerly sought? "**A Living Stone!**" The allusion is to Isaiah's marvelous prophecy of the coming Savior. "*Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste*" (Isa 28:16). Jesus is called a "*Living Stone*" because of His eternal nature and ongoing ministry. **There is nothing lifeless about Christ's Person or work!** Through Him God's great and eternal purpose is being carried out. Because every part of God's purpose is realized in Him alone, He is called the "*Foundation*." Because He has passed all of the tests of adversity, opposition, and Divine proving, He is called "*a tried stone*." Because He is the One determining the nature and extent of God's work, He is called "*a precious cornerstone*." Because nothing founded upon Him will fail, He is called "*a sure foundation*." **God has hinged everything upon Jesus!**

We are coming to Jesus "*as unto*" One possessing all of these qualities. We do not come only because we are weak, but because He is strong. We recognize in Him the only Man of whom God fully approves. He is the only One through whom any valid work can be accomplished. All other

works, and all other projects are vain, destined to failure.

Emphasizing the depravity caused by sin, the Spirit reminds us this indispensable “*Stone*” was “*rejected indeed by men.*” NKJV By saying “*indeed*” the Spirit emphasizes the rejection was deliberate, emphatic, and with unparalleled zeal. “*Men*” saw Jesus as irrelevant to what they were doing, and thus summarily rejected Him. They also perceived no connection between Him and God almighty. The irony of the situation was that this “*Stone*” was rejected by “*the builders*” (Lk 20:17; 1 Pet 2:7)—the ones charged with implementing the purpose of God. Their rejection was not casual. They set the Stone “*at nought,*” despising Him because of the way He conflicted with their purpose (Acts 4:11). Thus, as the foundation and corner stone, He was “*disallowed,*” not being permitted to be the key Person in the schemes of men. The rejection continues to this day! **In fact, those who are not coming to Him have really disallowed, despised, and rejected Him.**

Nevertheless, the Son remains “*chosen of God, and precious.*” The purpose of God is still being accomplished, even though “*the builders*” rejected the One indispensable to its fulfillment. Here the choice of God is contrasted with the choice of man. Men rejected the Stone, but the foundation was laid in spite of their rejection. Because Jesus is a “*Living Stone,*” men must still contend with Him. They will either come to Him or reject Him. But those who come will find Him “*precious,*” just as He is to God Himself. He is a “*well beloved*” Son to the Father, and precious and beloved to the “*comers*” as well. The very moment that perspective ceases to be held by a person, he has ceased coming to Jesus. Through subtlety the “*old serpent*” has diverted such an one to vain and pointless living, for God will honor nothing that is not founded upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

A HOUSE MADE OF LIVING STONES

“*Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house . . .*”^{NKJV} Just as the Foundation is a “*Living Stone,*” so those individuals placed upon it are “*living stones.*” They are characterized by spiritual life—involvement with the Person and purpose of God. Just as there is nothing static or dormant about Jesus, so there is nothing lifeless about those who are in Him. They are part of a purpose that is being fulfilled. In Christ, not only have they been identified with His past death, they are also integrated with His present ministry, and live in prospect of reigning forever with Him in glory. That is all involved in being “*living stones.*” It should also be apparent to you that this is an exceedingly rare perspective in the professed church. From the very first, Satan has been aggressive to divert the attention of believers from the Foundation Stone.

At this point, a clear distinction is made between the Foundation Stone and those built upon it. The Savior Himself is not presently advancing, or being perfected. Having been “*made perfect,*” He is now the “*Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him*” (Heb 5:9). But it is not so with the “*living stones.*” They are being “*built up a spiritual house.*” By this, the Spirit means they are being made a suitable habitation for the Living God. Elsewhere it is written, we are “*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone, in Whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in Whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit*”^{NKJV} (Eph 2:20-22). The building project is being implemented by the words of the “*Apostles and Prophets,*” to whom the Divine purpose was revealed. Because of His understanding of the purpose of God and the Foundation of Christ, Paul referred to himself as a “*wise master builder*” (1 Cor 3:10). Further, any person daring to defile this building with inferior materials, or unspiritual people, will be “*destroyed*” by God Himself (1 Cor 3:17). This is a most sobering consideration.

Notice that all believers, “*as living stones,*” are built up into a single house—“*a spiritual house.*” Christ is not divided, nor does He promote separate spiritual houses. There is a single foundation, and there is a single dwelling place for God. It is comprised of all of the people of God, with not a single one of them being excluded. A form of religion that excludes any of the people of God is, by

that very condition, brought under the curse of God. Thus the church is called “*the temple of God*” (1 Cor 3:16). Again it is written, “*you are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*” (2 Cor 6:16).

By saying “*spiritual house*,” the Spirit contrasts God’s dwelling with one constructed by men. This is a supernatural house, one crafted by Divine power. The materials used are “*living stones*,” created by God Himself in Christ Jesus. The bonding of these stones together is also supernatural, being accomplished by connection with the Head, “*from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow*”^{NIV} (Col 2:19). Effective building is directly proportionate to the involvement of God in the project. The more earth is involved, the less building is done.

The totality of the saved are also called a “*spiritual house*” because of the involvement of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:22 reminds us we are “*built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit*.”^{NIV} **Sin has so defiled humanity that God can only dwell within us because of Jesus Christ and by means of the Holy Spirit.** The awareness of this condition will deliver us from distorted views of our achievement, and from presumption, or willful sin, which is the “*great transgression*” (Psa 19:13). Apart from the energizing work of the Holy Spirit, all human effort is pointless and vain. As our blessed Lord affirmed, “*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing*”^{NKJV} (John 6:63).

Thus the entire Godhead is involved in the project. The house is for God. The Foundation of the house is the Lord Jesus Christ. The means through which God indwells the house is the Holy Spirit. All of this is facilitated through Divine activity--“*building*.”

A HOLY PRIESTHOOD

“*. . . an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*.”^{KJV} Salvation, in all of its aspects, involves the current activity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It should not surprise us, therefore, that the saved themselves are also appointed to activity. At this point, you will find a sharp contrast between the mind of the Spirit and the perception of the nominal Christian. Here we come to grips with the focus of our endeavors. This is at the very heart of serving God, and it is intensely personal.

A HOLY PRIESTHOOD. A “*holy priesthood*” is a dedicated one, devoted exclusively to God. The concept of the priesthood of reference was developed under the Law. It is found in the Levitical priests, the Aaronic priesthood being a type of Jesus. (1) The Levites were chosen of God for His service because of their zeal in purging the camp of sin (Ex 32:26-28). (2) They were excluded from the army (Lev 1:46-47). (3) They were not included in the census of the people (Lev 1:49). (4) They were appointed over the tabernacle and its ministry (Lev 1:50). (5) They pitched their tents around the tabernacle (Lev 1:53). (6) They had “*no inheritance*” with Israel, for the Lord was “*their inheritance*” (Deut 18:1-2). Thus men were taught of a life devoted exclusively to the Lord, with no earthly inheritance or allegiance. Here was a group of people separate from all others.

So it is with the saints of God. They have been called by grace into exclusive involvement with God. They are forbidden an inheritance in this world, being given “*the world to come*.” They are not numbered with other people, and live in close proximity to the Lord. Not only are believers a “*spiritual house*,” they are an active spiritual people. They not only receive blessing from God, they bring blessing to Him (Psa 103:1). Not only do they rejoice in the Lord (Phil 4:4), He also rejoices in them (Zeph 3:17). Whatever they do is for the Lord. As it is written, “*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him*” (Col 3:17). They are a “*holy priesthood*,” devoted exclusively to the Lord and His work.

SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES. The Levitical priests assisted the high priest in making sacrifices

for sin (2 Chron 29:12-22) After the Babylonian captivity, they also killed the passover lamb (Ezra 6:20-21). But the “*holy priesthood*” of believers offer continual sacrifices to God–“*spiritual sacrifices.*” Our first “*spiritual sacrifice*” is ourselves. As was said of the churches of Macedonia, “*they first gave themselves to the Lord*” (2 Cor 8:5). Further, we are to present our bodies as a “*living sacrifice*” to the Lord (Rom 12:1). A “*spiritual sacrifice*” is one that comes from the deepest part of man–his spirit. It is also one that is made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit. Whatever does not come from our very heart, and is not offered in the power of the Spirit, is no sacrifice at all. It is like a lame lamb or a diseased offering (Mal 1:8), and will not be accepted by the Lord.

ACCEPTABLE TO GOD. Something offered to God is one thing, but an offering received by God is quite another matter. Israel presented God with sacrifices He refused to accept (Lev 26:31; Isa 1:15; Amos 5:21-23). It would be staggering to know how many things are being ceremonially offered to God in our day, yet are rejected by Him. We have not been called into such vain activity. Ours is **not** a religion of mere formality. It includes sacrifices that are “*acceptable to God.*” Hebrews 13:16 speaks of sacrifices with which God is “*well pleased.*” We have been set apart for such holy activity. Those who are not convinced of the acceptance of the sacrifice are not apt to offer it.

God’s acceptance of our sacrifices, however, is owing to His Son. They are acceptable to Him “*by Jesus Christ.*” We must learn from this that however extensive our sacrifice may be, it must still be sanctified by the Lord Jesus. He is the heavenly salt with which every sacrifice must be “*salted*” (Lev 2:13; Mark 9:49). This is a Divine formality, but not a mere formality. Acceptance “*by Jesus Christ*” indicates the sacrifice was made within the context of fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9). Such sacrifices are the RESULT of abiding in Christ, and not the cause of it. Rest assured, abiding in the Son will motivate us to offer spiritual sacrifices to our God. Such sacrifices are, because of that, are accepted by the Lord.

LESSON #17

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{2,6}Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. ⁷Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, ⁸And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.” (1 Pet 2:6-8)

INTRODUCTION

We must never allow ourselves to lose an acute sense of the absolute centrality of Christ. He, and He alone, is the point at which our present acceptance and destiny are determined. God will not receive a person or a church that has relegated His only begotten Son into the background of their thinking and purpose. As simplistic as that may appear, it has remarkable ramifications. A considerable percentage of activity called “*Christian*” has little place for the Lord Jesus. His presence, Word, and power are rarely sought, being supplanted by an institutional emphasis. This is all the work of our enemy, the devil. He had flooded the contemporary church with the distractions of religious success, appearance, and career-thinking. But Christ remains the Head of the corner. Those who reject Him **in that capacity**, choosing to establish their own priorities, will stumble, falling upon the “*Stone of stumbling*,” and finally being rejected by the God who sent Him.

THE ONE WHO WILL NEVER BE PUT TO SHAME

“Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.”^{KJV} The Holy Spirit always sends us to the Scripture, anchoring our faith in Divine utterance. In the Kingdom of God, the ultimate proof of a matter is not human logic, visible evidence, or popularity with the people. It is always God’s Word—what has He said on the subject. And, if God has said nothing concerning the matter, it is unlawful for it to be the primary focus of our thought. This is a principle of God’s Kingdom, and is to be embraced.

Now the Spirit will confirm the truth stated in verses four and five. He will justify the choice of Jesus as the Foundation for life, as well as our total dependency upon Him. He will also confirm why our sacrifices are accepted of God “*by Jesus Christ*.”

The word “*contained*” is an unusually strong word. Most of the Standard versions are consistent in using this word. The RSV reads, “*it stands in Scripture*,” and the NIV reads “*in Scripture it says*.” But this means more than saying *it is in the Bible*—although it surely is. The emphasis of the expression is not what is contained, but what does the containing. It is as though the Spirit said, *The Scripture is wrapped around this truth*. Isaiah was used to provide the actual statement (Isa 28:16), but all of Scripture supports, and is about, this reality. God Himself placed His Son in Zion—where He works, and where He has placed His name—in these capacities. (1) The One through Whom every aspect of God’s working is determined: “*Chief Corner Stone*.” (2) God appointed Jesus to this saving ministry, and He has no relevance for men apart from salvation: “*Elect*.” (3) All Kingdom values find their apex in the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone brings value and worth to every facet of spiritual life: “*Precious*.” No word of Scripture has been written without regard to the Son of God, Savior of the world. It is all wrapped around Him, testifying of Him (John 5:39).

The positioning of the “*Chief Corner Stone*” was itself evidence of God’s Sovereignty. The devil sought to thwart the laying of this Stone, and provoked men to do their best to stop it also. Thus it is written, “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,*

against the LORD, and against His Anointed, saying, Let us break Their bands asunder, and cast away Their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon My holy hill of Zion” (Psa 2:2-6). The placement of the “Corner Stone” occurred when Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God (Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 3:22).

Because Jesus is the “*elect*,” nothing done independently of Him, or in disassociation from Him, will be recognized by God. God has chosen Him, and will receive no one who fails to choose Him also. Because of the effectiveness of His ministry toward believers, He is “*precious*,” for in Him our hopes are brought to fruition, and our deepest desires satisfied. He is “*precious*,” held in honor and prized most highly, to us, because that is how the Father regards Him. In a very real sense, what God thinks of Jesus is the very root of our acceptance. When we regard Jesus in the same manner as God, He fully receives us. That regard for Jesus is summarized in a single word: “*believes*.” We receive Jesus as God has presented Him, and have cast the weight of our soul and destiny upon Him.

Here we have one of the great promises of God: “***he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded.***” “*Confounded*” means “put to shame,”^{NIV} or “disappointed.”^{NASB} It means the person who believes on Christ will never be disgraced because of that faith. Such a person will never be made to blush for his unwavering faith in the Chief Corner Stone. Jesus is everything God has declared Him to be, and those who rely upon Him will find that to be true. The believer will never find a single aspect of life that is not supported by the Lord Jesus. There is not a single facet of our being that does not find its ultimate goal in the Son of God. There are no exaggerations about His accomplishments or the value and effectiveness of them. No statement concerning Him is merely rhetorical or metaphorical. The faith that is bold enough to fully embrace Christ, abandoning the poverty of this world and its wisdom, will never be proved wrong, or be dissatisfied.

THE DIFFERENCE IS FOUND IN BELIEVING

“Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the Stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the Head of the corner, ⁸And a Stone of stumbling, and a Rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word.”^{KJV} The most significant difference in people is not found in their works, but in their faith. To be sure, believers are different from the world in their manner of life. That is why their “*light*” can shine among men. They express themselves differently from the world. Yet, the root of all of their distinctiveness is their faith. Believing is the cause of an acceptable life! Apart from faith, it is not possible to please God, or to live for Him.

The Spirit now articulates the first and foremost effect of believing: it makes Jesus “*precious*” to us. He is “*the pearl of great price*” (Matt 13:46), and the “*bright and Morning Star*” (Rev 22:16). When it comes to nourishment, He is the “*Bread*” than came down from heaven, giving life to the world (John 6:35,41). The insatiable thirst of the human spirit is satisfied alone in Him (John 4:14; 6:35). To us, Jesus is most highly esteemed and honored. We are willing to give up anything but Him, and declare war on anything that threatens our possession of Him. “*He is precious!*” As Isaiah said, He is “*a beautiful crown and a glorious diadem to the remnant of His people*” (Isa 28:5).

But why has this preciousness occurred? What has caused the people of God to regard Jesus so highly? **It is their faith:** it is because they have believed the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). When they believed, the Father turned His face toward them, and opened the greatness of His Son to them. It is in this manner—by beholding, or believing in, the Son—that the Father draws us to Him (John 6:44). Note, the Spirit does not say Jesus OUGHT to be precious to

those who believe, but that He IS precious to them. Their faith has made Him precious—indispensable, and worthy of aggressive pursuit.

Believing in Jesus has brought God's view of the Son to us. It has brought us into harmony with heaven, so that we regard Jesus in the same manner, though not as fully, as our Father. God will do nothing toward us without the Son. The believer, obtaining the same mind, will also offer nothing to God apart from the Son.

Humanity is ultimately divided into two classes: believers and unbelievers, those who accept the Chief Corner Stone, and those who do not. Here those who fail to believe are referred to as "*them which be disobedient.*" This is so because the consummate disobedience is failing to believe in, and rely totally upon, the Son of God. Those who fail to believe on Christ have done precisely the same thing as "*the builders*"—the Jewish leaders. They have emphatically rejected Jesus as God has presented Him. God has said His Son is indispensable, and unbelievers have said that He is not. God has said men cannot be received apart from His Son, and unbelievers have dogmatically rejected that fact.

Although Jesus has been placed as a Chief Corner Stone and sure Foundation, He is also a "*Stone of stumbling, and a Rock of offence.*" The NIV reads, "*A Stone that causes men to stumble and a Rock that makes them fall.*" Men will be led to glory because they have received Jesus as their "*all in all,*" or they will fall into hell because they have rejected Him in that capacity. **Jesus will NOT take second place**, for God has already exalted Him "*above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come*" (Eph 1:21). Flesh is willing to make some place for Jesus, but not the preeminent place. Thus it constrains unbelievers to stumble over Jesus to their own destruction, rather than rely completely upon Him.

Only the preaching of Jesus will reveal the hearts of men. As long as men preach a social gospel, or a message that centers upon humanly perceived needs, the truth will not be known of men. But when the Son of God is preached in power, those who are approved of God, and those who are not, will be revealed. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the Sure Foundation and the Stone of stumbling—the means through which the destiny of all men is determined. He is the appointed basis of all God's dealing with men.

THOSE APPOINTED TO DESTRUCTION

"*. . . being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed.*"^{KJV} The strength of this expression is apparent. Those stumbling over the Lord Jesus instead of building upon Him are "*being disobedient.*" Such have heard the message, yet have chosen NOT to believe it. That is easy enough to perceive. It is the next statement that summons us to a higher plateau of reasoning: "*to which they also were appointed*"^{NKJV} . . . and to this doom they were also appointed^{NASB} . . . which is also what they were destined for^{NIV} . . . as they were destined to do^{NRSV}." However you choose to read this verse, it will prove to be challenging.

There are some Divine utterances that are especially destructive of humanly devised systems of thought. This is one of them. Here is a human response—"disobedient"—that is associated with an appointment. This cannot be an appointment made by men, for they are not capable of making such determinations. Nor, indeed, is it a determination of Satan, for he has not been granted such power. This is a Divine appointment—one that occurred BEFORE the deed of reference (disobedient) took place.

That such appointments are possible is confirmed in Scripture. **Pharaoh:** "*But indeed for this purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth*" (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17). **Some False Prophets:** "*For certain men have crept in*

unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation”^{NKJV} (Jude 4). **Judas:** “*Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place*”^{NKJV} (Acts 1:25). It is evident that these texts, and the one we are considering, do not handily fit into lifeless patterns of theological thought. They do, however, confirm that nothing is by chance in the Kingdom of our Lord and His Christ. They also attest that the Lord rules over all.

The chief difficulty in this text is the possibility that men are consigned to an eternal state, glory or perdition, against their will. But nothing in our text hints at the possibility of such a thing. Further, this cannot refer to God merely knowing ahead of time that these people would “*stumble,*” being “*disobedient,*” for that response is associated with God’s appointment. Admittedly, this is a lofty view, and care must be taken not to diffuse its power by placing it into the container of human opinion.

The thrust of this passage hinges upon believing, or receiving the Son in precisely the capacity in which the Gospel presents Him. I understand the determination of God to, in this text, be based upon that premise. This by no means exhausts the “*determinate counsel*” of God, but does present one of its key perspectives. The reasoning of the verses that follow, in my judgment, justifies the view I will here briefly develop.

God has determined the stability or the stumbling of every individual upon the basis of their response to the message of His Son. Those who receive Him as the Sure Foundation and Corner Stone are appointed to obtain salvation, stability, and eternal life (1 Thess 5:9). Those who do not believe are appointed to disobedience and ultimate destruction. I am certain that this only touches the hem of the garment, but feel it to be the thrust of this text. There is such a thing as being “*ordained to eternal life*”(Acts 13:48), and being “*chosen*” before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4). But all such appointments are always represented as contingent upon Christ Jesus.

Seen correctly, this does not diffuse the strength of this text. Those who imagine they can be a *Christian*, gain acceptance with God, and receive blessing from Him, independently of the Foundation of Christ are deluded. They have stumbled over the Stumbling Stone, been offended by the Rock, and are disobedient. By ignoring the appointed Foundation, they have come into an area of Divine determination, shutting themselves up to disobedience. In my judgment, this accounts for the dreadful condition of most churches. They have, in fact, rejected the foundation of God. They are building on another foundation, imagining their work to be good and acceptable.

Over and above all of this, we will no doubt find in the end that their unbelief and blindness of heart were actually a judgment from God, just as it was with Israel (Isa 29:10; Rom 11:8). Woe to the individual who dares to ignore the Lord Jesus, or fail to build upon Him! Such are tempting God, and, in that state, there is no way to escape His judgment.

LESSON #18

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” (1 Pet 2:9-10)

INTRODUCTION

There are two things that are consistently found throughout the writings of the Apostles. First, an emphasis is placed upon Jesus Christ—who He is, and what He has accomplished. Second, there is a declaration of who we are in Christ Jesus, and what we were outside of Him. It is particularly the latter that is now expressed by the Spirit: who we are in Christ, and what we were outside of Him. For your reference, similar passages include Romans 6:17-20; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; Ephesians 2:1-13; 5:8, and Titus 3:3-7. Faith will never take us beyond the vivid recollection of what we once were. Nor, indeed, will it fail to take into account what we have been made in Christ Jesus. These two perspectives help to maintain humility and hope at the same time. They also move us to cling to the Lord with purpose of heart, knowing that of ourselves we are nothing. These two emphases—who Christ is and who we are in Him—are not common in our day. Yet, you will find they still exercise a great influence upon the soul. They provide a contrast of conditions that only God could accomplish through the Lord Jesus Christ, by the Holy Spirit, and through our faith.

WHAT WE ARE IN CHRIST JESUS—THE CORNER STONE

^{42:9a}***“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people . . . ”***
^{KJV} The Spirit has already affirmed marvelous things about the saints. They are: (1) Elect, 1:2a (2) Sanctified by the Spirit and sprinkled with Christ’s blood, 1:2b. (3) Begotten by God to a living hope by Christ’s resurrection, 1:3. (4) Have an incorruptible inheritance reserved in heaven, 1:4. (5) Kept by the power of God, 1:5. (6) Are being purified by trial, 1:6-7. (7) Have been redeemed, 1:18. (8) Believe in God by Jesus, 1:21. (9) Have purified souls, 1:22. (10) Are born again of incorruptible seed, 1:23. (11) Are living stones, 2:5a. (12) Are built up a spiritual house, 2:5b. (13) Offering acceptable sacrifices to God, 2:5c. Now the Spirit will elaborate further on our condition. He will contrast the saints with those who, by appointment, stumbled over the Corner Stone (7-8).

CHOSEN GENERATION. A generation is a group of related people. Some versions read “*chosen race*” or “*chosen people*.” This is a view of God’s people in the aggregate, or in totality. It compares with Israel of old, who are also a chosen people (Deut 7:6; 14:2). They were a fleshly people, the saints are a spiritual one. They are a different kind of generation, being Christ’s own progeny. While He had no offspring in the flesh, He is an “*Everlasting Father*” in the Spirit (Isa 53:8; 9:6). By saying “*chosen*,” the Spirit means these are the people upon whom God’s favor rests. They are HIS choice. There are benefits that belong to them that pertain to no one else. This casts to the ground the “we are just like the Israelites” imagination. Here is a generation that has been adopted, and has received “*the Spirit of adoption*” (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5). They are GOD’s choice.

ROYAL PRIESTHOOD. Like the Levites of old, these have been appointed to Divine service. They do the work of the Lord, labor together with Him, and come into His presence to minister. By saying “*ROYAL priesthood*,” the Spirit accentuates our kingship in the Son (Rev 1:6). This contrasts with the description of Israel: “*kingdom of priests*” (Ex 19:6). The emphasis there was **separation to God**. The emphasis here is **participation with God**. This is a new phenomenon among the sons of men. Of old, no priest was also a king, and no king was also a priest. In fact, some priests were judged for assuming the role of leader (Korah, Num 16:1-32). Also, some kings

were judged by God for assuming the role of a priest (Uzziah, 2 Chron 26:18-19). But the saints are both kings and priests. They reign with Jesus, and offer spiritual sacrifices to God.

HOLY NATION. Not only are the saints “*chosen*,” they are also “*holy*.” They are a spiritual nation of “*holy*” people. They have been called to lead pure lives. As it is written, “*He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love*”^{NKJV} (Eph 1:4). We have been delivered to serve the Lord “*without fear in holiness and righteousness*” (Lk 1:74). **God cannot be served by unholy people!** That is one of the reasons for the Lord Jesus. An unholy church is a contradiction of terms. Here is a nation among nations – a “*holy nation*” among corrupt nations. Let those who are prone to glory in a nation, glory in the “*holy nation*,” which is the church of the Living God. The choice of God is only evident where the people are “*holy*.”

PECULIAR PEOPLE. “*Peculiar*” does not mean odd, unusual, or weird—although that is how the world regards believers. That particular trait is meant by “*strangers and foreigners*.” “*Peculiar*” means “*special*”^{NKJV}, “*God’s own*,”^{NRSV} or “*for God’s own possession*.”^{NASB} One might say “**peculiarly His**.” Thus God takes out of the world a people for Himself (Acts 15:14). Clearly, He does not view all men alike! There is a body of people that He favors above all others, and for whom He has reserved the choicest blessings. Inherent in the word “*peculiar*” is the concept of **purchase**. In fact the word means “*purchased possession*.” The concept is mirrored in Israel (Deut 4:20), and declared in Ephesians 1:14: i.e., “*until the redemption of the purchased possession*” (the same word).

Note that these are not objectives to be realized through our efforts, but blessings that have been conferred upon us. This IS the status of those who are in Christ Jesus. The recognition of it stimulates our faith, fortifies our hope, and enhances our joy and peace.

OUR APPOINTED PURPOSE

“^{2:9b} . . . *that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light*.”^{KJV} Here is the reason God purchased a people, reserving them for Himself. It was not simply that He felt sorry for us, and rescued us like one would recover a drowning man. Our deliverance was driven by a Divine purpose. We are the ones who “*show forth the praises of Him*.” This speaks of a strong affirmation of God’s workings. Other versions read, “*proclaim the praises of Him*,”^{NKJV} “*proclaim the mighty acts of Him*,”^{NRSV} “*declare the praises of Him*,”^{NIV} “*proclaim the excellencies of Him*,”^{NASB} and “*declare the wonderful deeds of Him*.”^{RSV} This is precisely what took place on the day of Pentecost. Word got around of a most unusual phenomenon. “*We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God*” (Acts 2:11). Religious sophists have drawn attention to the speaking in tongues. The Spirit draws attention to what they were declaring. They were telling the people “*The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad*” (Psa 126:3). In particular, what He has accomplished in His son, and how His Son has been exalted to give repentance and remission of sin (Acts 5:31).

God did reveal this mystery to the Apostles, who were responsible for laying the foundation (Eph 2:20; 3:5). But He has chosen a spiritual nation to declare those praises. He only makes provision for **insightful** praises—everything else is spurious and unacceptable. In a day when praise and worship are being mimicked and emulated, this is something that needs to be clarified. The word to all who are unregenerate and blind is, “*let all the earth keep silence before Him*” (Hab 2:20), and “**Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD**” (Zeph 1:7), and “**Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD**” (Zech 2:13). Only those who are chosen, royal, holy, and belonging to the Lord can show forth, or declare, His praise! They have been chosen to do that. It does get down to the personal level also. Our commission is much like that given to the former demonic of the Gadarenes, “*tell them what great things the Lord has done for you*”^{NKJV} (Mk 5:19). This is nothing

less that accounting for the distinctions that grace has made in us, and giving an answer for the hope that is within us (1 Pet 3:15).

God has drawn us out of this world to show Himself to us, that we might declare His greatness. This is chiefly made known in *“the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10). While men choose to be specialists in various fields of human knowledge, God has separated a people to Himself who are specialists in the knowledge of God—people who are acquainted with His ways as revealed in Jesus Christ.

Our exit from the realm of spiritual darkness is traced to the call of God. He *“called us out of darkness”* through the Gospel (2 Thess 2:14). Elsewhere the Spirit says that we were not only in darkness, we ourselves were darkness: *“you were once darkness”* (Eph 5:8). That was a state of alienation from, and ignorance of, God. Our works were then associated with that moral and spiritual darkness, reflecting our hostility toward God and ignorance of His ways (Rom 13:12). Such works are *“unfruitful”* and to be thrust from us as defiling and totally unacceptable (Eph 5:11). **A persons “work” reflects where they are, whether in the darkness or in the light.**

But we have not only been called out of darkness. We have also been called INTO His *“marvelous light.”* This is the *“light”* in which we can *“see light,”* or behold the nature of all things (Psa 36:9). It is a reflected light, beheld in Jesus Christ. In Divine power, God burst through the stifling darkness, showing Himself and delivering us. As it is written, *“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”*^{NKJV} (2 Cor 4:6). This is a *“marvelous”* light, or illumination. It captures the heart and is perceived as worthy of intense attention. It is beyond human comprehension, but not beyond the grasp of faith. The *“marvelous light”* is what draws us into the heart of God’s will. It dispels any notion that something better can be possessed, dwarfing all competing influences.

THEN AND NOW

“⁴⁰Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”^{KJV} In order to confirm that salvation is wholly of the Lord, the Spirit shows us two mountains that are as far apart as Gerizim and Ebal, from which the blessings and cursings of the Law were read (Deut 27:11-13).

PEOPLE. Let us have done with theological generalities that view all men alike, or affirm that God recognizes everyone. Prior to our regeneration, we were *“not a people.”* The spirit now speaks in the words of the prophet Hosea. *“For you are not My people, And I will not be your God. Yet the number of the children of Israel Shall be as the sand of the sea, Which cannot be measured or numbered. And it shall come to pass In the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not My people,’ There it shall be said to them, ‘You are sons of the living God’”* (Hos 1:9-10). This referred to the Jews in particular, to whom Peter was writing. The same point, however, is mentioned later in Romans (9:25-26). There it is applied to the Gentiles. The point is that in a state of nature, people are not recognized in heaven. They are *“not a people.”* Such have *“no hope, and are without God in the world”* (Eph 2:12).

But what a change has been wrought in the *“chosen generation.”* Now they are, in truth, *“the people of God.”* They are the ones upon whom His eye is focused. They are the ones to whom His ears are open (Psa 34:15). This is a transition from rejection to acceptance, and alienation to reconciliation. They are not **A** people of God, but **THE** people of God. God’s power is toward them (Eph 1:19). He has reserved an inheritance in heaven for them (1 Pet 1:4). He has assigned them to be custodians of His truth (1 Tim 3:15). They are to be envied above all other people!

MERCY. Here the Spirit affirms that our acceptance as a people is strictly owing to the mercy

of God. Prior to being in Christ we “*had not received mercy.*”^{NIV} Our sins were not forgiven, and the devil himself worked in us. We had no promise for good, no intercessor in heaven,, and no Holy Spirit within. All of that is involved in **NOT** obtaining mercy. Stated from another viewpoint, the wrath of God was “*abiding*” on us (John 3:36), and we were “*condemned already*” (John 3:18). Again, the appeal is made to the words of Hosea. “*And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; Then I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’*” (Hos 2:23). Paul spoke of this glorious transaction on a very personal basis. “*Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief*”^{NKJV} (1 Tim 1:13).

We must associate our salvation with the wonderful mercy of God. **The word “mercy” emphasizes God’s compassion and pity.** It is more than a mere emotion, involving **HELPING** the afflicted, like the good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37). “*Mercy*” includes the idea of kindness, benevolence, and generosity. Mercy is what moved God to change our nature and condition. As it is written, “*Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*” (Tit 3:5). This was no small amount of mercy, but a lavish pouring out of it. “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again*”^{NKJV} (1 Pet 1:3). It took that kind of mercy to save us. That is how far we were from God! No wonder the Spirit associates God’s purpose with God being glorified “*for His mercy*” (Rom 15:9).

But this mercy is ongoing, just as being the people of God continues. Because we are now the people of God, we can continue receiving mercy. As it is written, “*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*”^{NKJV} (Heb 4:16). We not only “*obtained mercy*” when we were delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s “*dear Son*” (Col 1:13), we continue to obtain it. He grants it in deep compassion of our situation, and in divine pity (Psa 103:13-14). He is generous toward those who come to Him, and tender and kind. The recognition of the wonderful change that has been wrought in us is a constant source of spiritual refreshment. It is also a means by which God is glorified and praised.

LESSON #19

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{2:11}Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; ¹²Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.” (1 Pet 2:11-12)

INTRODUCTION

The “*good fight of faith*” is an aggressive one, calling for the complete devotion of the people of God. Faith always puts us at a seeming disadvantage. When Israel came into Canaan, they did not face one small nation, but “*seven nations greater and mightier*” than themselves (Deut 7:1). In such a circumstance, an acute awareness of absolute dependency upon the Lord is cultured. This is the picture the Spirit now places before us. We are engaged in a battle that is fierce and unrelenting. The appetites of our Adamic nature are calling out for gratification, and will not keep silence. Faith, however, empowers us to resist them, “*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*” in order that we might “*live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world*” (Tit 2:12). In this way, we are not only working out our own salvation, but providing a reference point for the ungodly. When the Lord, through various ways, deals with their hearts, they will be able to recall how the world did not move the faithful. It is then, in the context of “*visitation,*” that they can see how unjustly they had treated the saints, and thus be provoked to glory God.

BESEECHING AS STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

“^{2:11}Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims . . .” ^{KJV} The words “*dearly beloved*” are especially significant, and very strong. They come from a word meaning “dear, very much loved.” The word is used thirty (30) times in Scripture, and always (with one exception--the Jews, Rom 11:28) of those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 12:19; 1 Cor 10:14; 15:58; 2 Cor 7:1; 12:19; Phil 2:12; 4:1; 1 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:2; Heb 6:9; James 1:16,19; 2:5; 1 Pet 2:11; 4:12; 2 Pet 3:1,8,14,17; 1 John 2:7; 3:2,21; 4:1,7,11; Jude 3,17,20). It is a spiritually affectionate term, confirming that those closest to the Lord are also most precious to the saints. The value of the saints cannot be overstated.

To “*beseech*” is to implore, entreat, or make a strong appeal. It is to earnestly ask for something, and even to beg. But there is a very personal aspect to this word. It means to come very close to the individual, as one who is eager to help and assist. It can be pictured as a person putting his arm around his close friend and giving him precious counsel. This confirms “*the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace*” (James 3:18). In this close and loving relationship the will of the Lord can more easily be accomplished in us.

The Spirit now appeals to our status in Christ: “*strangers and pilgrims.*” This is our relationship to the world. We are “*strangers*” because we do not belong here, but are “*aliens,*” holding basic citizenship in heaven. A “*stranger*” is one who lives in a certain realm without the benefit of citizenship, or fitting into the culture. A “*pilgrim*” is a resident foreigner whose stay is temporary. He is passing through a land, but really is no part of it. Thus, two aspects of our life are seen. (1) First, we are not of the world order, and therefore do not fit into it. (2) Secondly, we are en route to the real promised land, seeing our stay in this world as temporary, and not primary.

Abraham confessed to the children of Heth, “*I am a stranger and a sojourner with you*” (Gen 23:4). When David blessed the Lord at the gathering of the offering for the building of the Temple, he said, “*For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding*” (1 Chron 29:15). He also confessed in the 119th

Psalm, *“I am a stranger in the earth.”*^{v19} The holy people of old *“confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* (Heb 11:13). Jacob referred to his entire life (130 years) as *“the days of my pilgrimage.”* David also referred to his life in this world as *“my pilgrimage”* (Psa 119:54).

Faith uproots the believer from *“this present evil world”* (Gal 1:4). Once reconciled to God, the believer becomes acutely aware of the friction of this world, and of his own separation from it. When your name is written in heaven, it is removed from basic citizenry in this world. Reconciliation to God produces enmity in the world. That is not what it should do, but what it **does!** A person who is not a *“stranger and pilgrim”* in this world is not living by faith. In fact, such is the very enemy of God (James 4:4).

Here is an appeal made to those who are at variance with the world, do not belong to its order, and are passing through it to a *“better country”* (Heb 11:16). Those who call our attention to our earthly status, roles, and functions, are doing us no favor. The strongest appeals are not made in view of our earthly roles, however valid and blessed they may be. The most powerful motivation is experienced when we recall we are *“strangers,”* outsiders, foreigners, and aliens, in this world. We are journeying through the world like Israel did through the desert. We will not be here long, and thus the Spirit encourages us to make the most of our time. By so doing, we will be the better prepared for eternity.

Our time in this world requires that we wear *“the whole armor of God”* (Eph 6:10-17). It necessitates our vigilance, or watchfulness (1 Pet 5:8; Rev 3:2). It should not surprise us if the world rejects us like the men of Sodom rejected Lot: *“This one came in as an alien, and already he is acting like a judge”*^{NASB} (Gen 19:9). Thus we are not exhorted in view of our earthly status, but in consideration that our names are written in heaven. The exhortation that follows only makes good sense to us in that context. Further, we will only be able to fulfill it in view of our strangership and pilgrimage in this world.

FLESHLY LUSTS THAT WAR AGAINST THE SOUL

“^{2:11b} . . . abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.”^{KJV} The word *“abstain”* means to reject, refrain from, keep away from, or separate ourselves from. In our text, it is not a once-for-all action, like rejecting a one-time offer. This is a continual rejection, or abstaining from. It is pictured in Potiphar’s wife attempting to seduce Joseph *“day by day”* (Gen 39:10). It is also seen in Delilah’s treacherous tempting of Samson *“when she pressed him daily with her words, and urged him”* (Judges 16:16). Continually abstaining is required because of a continual assault upon our souls.

The things from which we abstain are called *“fleshly lusts.”* Other versions read *“desires of the flesh,”*^{NRSV} *“the passions of the flesh,”*^{RSV} *“sinful desires,”*^{NIV} and *“sensual urges—the evil desires, the passions of the flesh [your lower nature].”*^{AMPLIFIED} These are the yearnings of our *“old man,”* which *“is crucified”* with Christ (Rom 6:6). Although crucified, our *“old man,”* or *“flesh,”* has not yet succumbed. We are to *“reckon”* ourselves to be *“dead indeed unto sin”* (Rom 6:11), but sin is not yet dead unto us. It still speaks to us, lures us, and tempts us to return to our old ways, like the impenitent thief on the cross tempted Jesus, *“If thou be Christ, save thyself AND US”* (Lk 23:39). The *“flesh”* will do anything but die!

It might surprise you to know that a considerable percentage of *Christians* are taught there really is no struggle between the flesh and the spirit. They are taught that Jesus took the flesh and the struggle away, and that it no longer exists. If this was the case (which it emphatically is not), this verse would have no relevance whatsoever. You cannot *“abstain”* from something you do not confront. James reminds us that temptation consists of being drawn away by our *“own lust, and*

enticed” (James 1:14). These lusts are further identified in Colossians 3:5, and are said to be OUR “members that are upon the earth.” In view of this circumstance, Paul acknowledged that in his “flesh dwelt no good thing” (Rom 7:18). Again, the Spirit reminds that an incessant war is going on between the Spirit and our flesh, prohibiting us from doing what we really desire. “For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish”^{NKJV} (Gal 5:17). To deny the existence of such a warfare is to confess to spiritual ignorance and a defiled heart. The experience of every believer will confirm the saved are continually assaulted with temptations—“fleshly lusts.”

“The flesh” is the part of us that is “born of the flesh” (John 3:6), or the part that came from Adam. It is the natural, or unregenerate, part of us, and is to be denied and “put off” because of its unchangeable corruption (Tit 2:12; Eph 4:22; Col 3:9).

But this is not mere Law, or a lifeless commandment. The desires from which we are to abstain “war against soul”—and aggressively so. They are to us what the Philistines were to the Israelites. “Fleshly lusts” seek to pull us down from the “heavenly places” into which we have been raised (Eph 2:6). They are the arsenal Satan uses against us. Yet, they cannot force us to descend into Satan’s domain. Instead, they seek to allure us by making us think there are advantages to be had in the realm of darkness.

The phrase “war against the soul” suggests that yielding to them will result in the forfeiture of our soul. As Jesus said, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”^{NKJV} (Matt 16:26). This is not a war of mere emotion, causing depression, discouragement, and other similar conditions. Those are matters with which we must also contend, but that is not the point of this text. The “war” is in the realm of desire, preferences, and longings—wanting something that will eventually lead to condemnation.

These “fleshly lusts” cannot deliver what they offer. At best, they deceive men into indulging in “the pleasures of sin for a short time”^{NIV} (Heb 11:25). The fact that these desires are so strong and relentless accounts for Peter’s strong beseeching, or pleading. We need continual exhortations and encouragements in this area. Our faith has not only set us against the world without us, but also against the worldly nature within us—“the flesh.”

THE IMPACT OF HONORABLE CONDUCT

“^{2:12}Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”^{KJV} The word “conversation” refers to our manner, or direction, of life. Alternate words are “behavior,”^{NASB} “conduct,”^{RSV} and “lives.”^{NIV} The word “honest” means more than simply without deception. It includes “excellent,”^{NASB} “honorably,”^{NRSV} and “good.”^{NIV} This is really the only acceptable life, and it is only possible when we “abstain from fleshly lusts.” There is no honor, excellence, goodness, or honesty in the flesh. All of those virtues are forfeited when we yield to its allurements.

“The Gentiles” are those who do not know God—the pagans.^{NIV} Thus the Scriptures refer to “the Gentiles which know not God” (1 Thess 4:5). Although unworthy of an extensive dialog, here is an interesting observation. While religious men are anxious to emphasize trying to “reach the lost,” here is an exhortation of quite another order. It assumes a certain antagonism between the godly and the ungodly, and exhorts believers to conduct themselves so that their good works may be seen. This correlates precisely with the word of our Lord. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:16). Note also, our conduct is “AMONG the Gentiles.” It is understood that this is where we all are—“among the Gentiles,” or “in the world,” which, to us, is a foreign land.

Note also that those who do not know God “*speak against you as evildoers.*” It is assumed this will happen, because you are of another order. When given the occasion, or when they are provoked by your godly words or conduct, they WILL malign you, as though you were an evildoer, or in the wrong. Even at His weakest point (2 Cor 13:4), those not knowing God maligned Jesus (Matt 27:42; Lk 23:36). It should not surprise us that when men are ignorant of God, they begin to speak about His people as though they are foolish and in the wrong. It is not strange for such charges to come from religious circles, even as it did with Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Apostles.

When “*good works*” are beheld, it is not because we aggressively press them upon the wicked. They are beheld because of their CONTRAST with the manner of this world. Our faith permeates what we do, distinguishing our works from those of the world. Too, when we “*abstain from fleshly lusts,*” it adds a heavenly flavor to our words and deeds. Make no mistake about this, the world does see what we do—or the manner in which we live. We are shining “*as lights in the world,*” and such a light cannot be hidden (Phil 2:15).

The impact of the spiritually ignorant beholding our good works is most remarkable: they will “*glorify God in the day of visitation.*” While some believe this to be a reference to the ultimate “*visitation,*” the return of the Lord, this is not the case. I know of no other place where the Spirit suggests that seeing our good works will provoke people to glorify God when Jesus comes again. This text is referring to the visitation of God upon sinners in both benefit and judgment. The appearing of Jesus is thus called a Divine “*visitation*” (Lk 1:68; 19:44; Acts 15:14). Thus Saul of Tarsus glorified God in the day of his visitation because of Stephen’s light (Acts 22:20). From the day he had witnessed the death of that first martyr, it was difficult for him to “*kick against the pricks,*” or goads (Acts 9:5).

God does “*visit*” the sin of people upon them (Ex 32:34). If people are tempted to imagine this is only toward God’s people, let them remember the flood, Babel, Babylon, the Canaanites, the Egyptians, and Sodom and Gomorrah. It is God’s manner to visit “*the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate*” Him (Ex 20:5; 34:7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9).

Whether the “*visitation*” is an opportunity to turn to the Lord, the sound of the Gospel, or punishment for sin, the lives of the godly provide a means through which the sinner may be recovered. In the midst of such Divine influences, those who are ignorant of God may recall the glowing life of His people, and thus be moved to turn to the Lord and call upon His name. Thus He will be glorified “*in the day of visitation.*” Believers are not to imagine their holy lives are undetected and unnoticed by ungodly people.

LESSON #20

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{2:13}Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; ¹⁴Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. ¹⁵For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: ¹⁶As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” (1 Pet 2:13-16, KJV)

INTRODUCTION

The practicality of faith is a worthy subject of meditation. While we are not of this world, being strangers and pilgrims in it, nevertheless we do conduct ourselves honorably while we remain in it. The Spirit will show us how the Lord has chosen to show the ignorance of unregenerate men. Among other things, He will do it by presenting a contrast between life lived in His light, and life lived in the darkness of this present evil world. While we are in the world, we confront requirements originated by men. What is to be our response to them? How are we to discern which ones, if any of them, impinge upon our faith, or require that we deny the Living God? The instruction given by the Spirit is marvelous, opening profound considerations to us. Remember, the Lord is showing us how to conduct ourselves in a world to which we do not belong. Our citizenship is in heaven. Still, the Lord will not allow us to withdraw from life in the world as though we were free from all responsibilities. There are practical matters to which we must give heed.

SUBMITTING TO THE ORDINANCES OF MEN

“^{2:13}Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; ¹⁴Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.”^{KJV} There is an underlying reason for this teaching. When man fell, he entered into a depraved moral condition—one in which disorder, confusion, violence, and all manner of social disturbance were initiated. In His mercy, the Lord ordained government to subdue the outbreak of anarchy and violence, and to encourage civility. This is declared in the thirteenth chapter of Romans. *“Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God”* (13:1-2). The twofold purpose of government is to encourage good works and punish evildoers (13:3-5). To resist the authority of civil leaders, therefore, is to *“resist the ordinance of God,”* or what He has ordained.

When the Spirit says *“every ordinance of man,”* He is viewing government from its most lofty viewpoint. The new birth results in us being separated from the world. But it does not make us rebels, or cause us to resist government and rule. The word *“ordinance”* does not mean *“a law,”* as though the text said *“Submit to every law men impose upon you.”* Rather, it refers to human authority, used for the purpose of social order. It is an institution formed by men, but under the authority of God. Other versions read, *“For the Lord's sake accept the authority of every human institution”*^{NRSV} . . . *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men*^{NIV} . . . *Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution.”*^{NASB} That the *“ordinance”* refers to rulers, and not the laws they make, is evident from the explanation: *“king,” “governors,”* etc.

No child of God is to known as an anarchist, like Barabbas, who was involved in insurrection against the government, and even committed murder in the insurrection (Mk 15:7). When Caesar Augustus decreed that a census be taken, and taxes paid, Joseph and Mary submitted. In fact, God was glorified in their submission by the Savior being born at that time (Lk 2:1-5). When tax collectors asked Peter if Jesus paid taxes, or tribute, he answered *“Yes.”* Jesus elaborated on the

subject to Peter, telling him that technically He owed no tax, for He was the Owner.

“Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee” (Matt 17:26-27). A noble example, indeed! Later, when queried about whether or not it was lawful to pay tribute to heathen Caesar, Jesus replied, *“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's”* (Matt 22:17-21). In both cases, He was submitting to every ordinance of man.

All of this is done *“for the Lord's sake,”* in order that no reproach be brought upon Him through our insubordination. This means we will not submit to a law that demands we deny Christ and blaspheme His holy name. But if we break the normal civil laws, we will accept the punishment due to us. This very spirit was also manifested in Paul. When called before a Roman judgment seat he said, *“For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die”* (Acts 25:11). He was submitting to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.

Notice the objectives of the rulers: *“the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.”* We understand such rulers to be under Divine authority. God can work out His purposes for us through them. How else can you account for Joseph in Egypt (Gen 39:21; 41:44-46), or Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah in Babylon (Dan 1:4-6; 6:2)? How about Nehemiah in Persia (Neh 2). All of them were rewarded by civil leaders—men who did not know God. Yet, God favored these men because they submitted to *“every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.”* All levels of human authority can become means through which the people of God receive Divine consideration. If you will ponder this matter, you will find that you have also experienced such benefits.

A KEY FACTOR IN THE WILL OF GOD

“^{2:15}For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”^{KJV} The world speaks against the people of God because they are of another order, belonging to another world. As the Lord Jesus said, *“If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you”* (John 15:19). However, there are occasions when the world blasphemes God and His Word because of the ungodly conduct of those wearing the name of Christ (Rom 2:24; 1 Tim 5:14; 6:1; Tit 2:5). This is not the will of God.

Those who speak against the Lord, even though they focus their attention on the inconsistent behavior of professed believers, are described as ignorant and foolish. They are ignorant because they do not know God or His power. They are foolish because they dare to speak against the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth. How is it that they can be silenced? Or, are we to imagine they cannot be silenced at all?

Here is something that is *“the will of God.”* There is not room for opinion on the matter, and those living in contradiction of this are out of the will of God, profession notwithstanding. The people of God are NOT to be noted for foolishness, inconsideration, dishonesty, and slothfulness. The mentioning of their name should not conjure up recollections of uncomely behavior. The saints are to be noted for doing *“good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10). **“Well doing”** is a means by which we seek for God's blessing. As it is written, *“To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life”* (Rom 2:7). It is an area in which we are not to become weary (Gal 6:9; 2 Thess 3:13).

This is doing that *“cannot be condemned”* (Tit 2:8). It is being *“blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world”* (Phil 2:15). As you might expect, the Lord Jesus is the Pioneer of this type

of life. Once He challenged those who sought to stone Him, *“Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?”* (John 10:32). After an exhaustive search, even Pilate twice admitted, *“I find no fault in Him”* (John 19:4,6). When His enemies tried to produce a reason for putting Him to death, they had to summon false witnesses against Him. Even then, it was hard to find someone who would lie about Him (Matt 26:59-60). The same may be said of Stephen, against whom they could not register a charge. They finally *“secretly persuaded some men to say, We have heard Stephen speak words of blasphemy against Moses and against God”*^{NIV} (Acts 6:11). Also, when Paul was arrested at the instigation of unbelieving Jews, he boldly announced, *“Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me”* (Acts 24:13).

One might object that the well doing of Jesus and the others did not stop their enemies from speaking against them. However, *“put to silence”* does not mean they raise no more accusations, although God is fully able to make that happen. It was said of Israel as they were about to come out of Egypt, *“But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast”* (Ex 11:7). But that is not the intent of this verse.

Rather, the meaning is that our enemies will not be able to bring a just accusation against us. They will have no cause to malign us. When those who are foolish and ignorant can find legitimate reason to speak against us, we have not done well! The blessing of the Lord is upon you *“when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you **falsely**, for my sake”* (Matt 5:11). Thus legitimate charges of evil are silenced, not being brought against the saints. That is God’s will for you.

There is more to this, to be developed later in this Epistle. A godly demeanor will also contribute to awakening our enemies to the unjustness of their criticism. Thus the spirit reasons, *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . . that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, **they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ”*** (1 Pet 3:16). Therefore, our light exposes their darkness, while their charges are proved false.

THE USE OF OUR LIBERTY

^{2:16} *As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.*^{KJV} Our liberty in Christ is a marvelous thing. In fact, it is for continued liberty that we have been freed. *“It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery”*^{NASB} (Gal 5:1). This freedom, however, does not mean the removal of restraint or personal discipline. Our freedom is all Godward—free to come to God, remain with Him, and receive from Him. We are free to abstain from all appearance of evil, and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (1 Thess 5:22; 2 Cor 7:1). No freedom or license has been granted to the flesh. Rather, it is to be *“crucified with its affections and lusts”* (Gal 5:24). There is no aspect of spiritual life that is centered in the saved themselves. It all centers in God and Christ. Those, therefore, who imagine freedom means they can indulge in things God condemns, without any fear of reprisal, are foolish indeed!

Those in Christ do not live for themselves. As it is written, *“He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again”* (2 Cor 5:15). While this frame of mind is not that common in the professed Christian community, it is the ONLY acceptable stance for life. Paul stated it well when he said, *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me”* (Gal 2:20). Freedom, then, provides only death for the flesh.

The phrase *“as free”* means *“Live as free men.”*^{NIV} Do not live in such a way as to make people think you are under harsh and miserable bondage. Christ’s yoke is easy and His burden light. Men

should not conclude otherwise by beholding our manner of life.

The particular point of this statement is that spiritual life does not provide for the harm of another. At no point are we free to hurt someone. That is why the Spirit says, “*Do not use your freedom as a covering for evil.*”^{NASB} The verses that follow confirm that doing evil to other people is the point. That does not exclude the indulgence of the flesh, or the entertainment of secret lusts. However, that is not the intent of this passage.

There have been people who have assaulted and even killed believers in the name of religion. Stephen is a case in point, as well as thousands of martyrs throughout history. But such freedom is not afforded to those who are in Christ Jesus. They cannot indulge in malicious conduct, sanctioning it by saying the person opposed richly deserved it. The venom of hatred must not issue forth from the saints of God! Our religion, so to speak, must not become the authorization to hurt, offend, and defame others. You must know there is altogether too much of this in the sectarian church world. People use what they call spiritual liberty to vent their malice on those not seeing things as they do. It is wrong!

The Lord outlines for us how our liberty may be expressed. “*But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*”^{NKJV} (Matt 5:44). Again it is written, “*Therefore If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head*” (Rom 12:20). The heaping of coals of fire upon the head of our enemy refers to the same thing Peter mentions: i.e., “*that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*”^{NKJV} (3:16). Thus their conscience will burn like that of Saul of Tarsus after he heard Stephen cry out, “*Lord, do not charge them with this sin*” (Acts 7:60). From that time, it was “*hard*” for him to “*kick against the goads*” of his conscience.

Again, the supreme example of conducting ourselves as “*servants of God*” is found in our blessed Lord. A single instance will suffice. When the soldiers came to arrest Jesus in the Garden, Peter came His defense. With a sweeping blow of his sword, doubtless intended to behead the enemy, he cut off the ear of Malchus, one of the soldiers. Jesus “*touched his ear, and healed him*” (Lk 22:51). You are free to do such acts of kindness to your enemies also. What a marvelous freedom for which Christ has freed us!

LESSON #21

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

^{2:17}***Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*** ¹⁸***Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.*** ¹⁹***For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.*** ^{NKJV} (1 Pet 2:17-19)

INTRODUCTION

Our text continues to develop the impact faith has upon our lives in the world. Although we are “*strangers and pilgrims*” in the world, faith does not free us to live as though we have no relationship to its civil responsibilities. Faith removes our primary citizenship from this world, and places it in heaven. However, it does not make us anarchists like Barabbas. Under the government of our faith, earthly relationships are not ignored, even though they are not viewed as fundamental or primary. There is a tendency in professed believers to think that secondary things have no relevance to life in Christ. This is not the case, as our text will prove. Faith is versatile, enabling its possessor to live in this world while holding primary citizenship in heaven. What is more, God is glorified in this arrangement. That is because it is accomplished while serving only one master. Our lives in this world are lived unto the Lord—both in word and deed (Col 3:17). While this does incur the hatred and opposition of the world toward the believer, it is unjust. Faith never causes injustice or insubordination in the child of God. Rather, it makes one a peacemaker who “*does good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith*” (Gal 6:10). The world is the better because of the people of God, and never the worse. Our text summons us into conscious conformity with these realities.

HONOR, LOVE, AND FEAR

^{2:17}***Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.*** ^{KJV} The breadth of the faith life is challenging to consider. Too, the believer does not require a lot of detailed instructions, or “how to” procedures. This sharply clashes with much contemporary religion, showing it to be false and inhibiting, rather than corrective, as is often affirmed. Here is a level of thinking that must be brought into our hearts and minds. Each of these four statements is large, but faith will come to the proper conclusion concerning them. These are not listed in the order of their priority.

HONOR ALL MEN. Here we are challenged to view “*men*” from the highest viewpoint. They are to be “*honored*” because they bear the Divine image. As it is written, “*But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be*” (James 3:8-10). The best among us will struggle with the tendency to speak derisively of men, not considering their origin, need, or that Christ died for them. With great solemnity the Spirit says, “*speak evil of no one . . . be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men*” (Tit 3:2). “*Evil speaking,*” as declared earlier in this chapter, is to be “*put away*” (2:1). The idea here is to promote peace and friendship among men—“*all men.*” “*Honor,*” in this case, does not mean to set men on a pedestal of glory, but to be respectful that they are the “*offspring of God*” (Acts 17:29).

LOVE THE BROTHERHOOD. There is a difference between our attitude toward “*all men*” and the saints of God. We do good “*especially*” to them (Gal 6:10). They bear a more precise image of God, created in them in regeneration (Col 3:10). The expression “*the brotherhood*” does not refer to our particular group, as though the Spirit has said “*OUR brotherhood.*” Unfortunately, there is altogether too much of this kind of thinking in the *Christian* community. “*The brotherhood*” refers to ALL those who are in Christ Jesus. By virtue of their union with Christ, they

are related to one another. Some of them are “*weak*” (Rom 14:1). Some are in need of repentance, and need to be recovered (Gal 6:1). Some are novices (1 Tim 3:6; 1 Cor 3:1). We are not only to love the strong, the victors, and the mature, but **all** of “*the brotherhood.*” It is not enough to love only those of our group, or those with whom we most frequently fellowship. Our “*love*” for them is based upon their relation to Christ, not their theological persuasion. We “*love*” them for precisely the same reason God loves us. This will require wisdom and discretion, but it is to be done. Sectarianism has greatly complicated the expression of such love.

FEAR GOD. Our faith produces familiarity with the Living God, but it does not remove the fear of Him. As long as we are “*in the body*” (Heb 13:3), we are subject to detracting influence that can cause us to ignore and even despise God. These can be resisted, praise the Lord, but not without discernment and effort. Fearing God involves being alarmed at the thought of offending Him, disobeying Him, or becoming guilty before Him. This type of fear does not cause us to draw back from God, but press the closer to Him. It is produced within the framework of an acute consciousness of God. He is the dominating consideration of life, compelling us to fulfill these very exhortations. When the impenitent thief chided Jesus on the cross, the other thief replied, “*Do you not even fear God, seeing you are under the same condemnation?*” (Lk 23:40). Even in spiritual infancy, he knew that fearing God impacted upon the way men speak and live. Jesus once said, “*But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!*”^{NKJV} (Lk 12:5). That is always in order.

HONOR THE KING. We give respect to ordained authority, which the king represents. It is interesting that this form of government is generally despised by men. Yet those under it are told to give honor to the king. Should they sin, holy men will rebuke them like John the Baptist did Herod (Matt 14:4). Jesus called Herod a “*fox,*” yet did not dishonor him by fomenting a rebellion against him (Lk 13:32).

WHAT SERVANTS ARE FREE TO DO

“^{2:18}*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.*”^{NKJV} Once again, the versatility of faith is seen. Unregenerate men would consider this an unreasonable request—to be submissive to inconsiderate and harsh masters. But faith thinks differently. Slavery, while not ideal, did exist in those days. Thus considerable instruction was given to slaves who had turned to Christ. Such were not to conclude that new life in Christ would suddenly bring an end to their enslavement. “*Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free*” (Eph 6:5-8). Colossians says much the same thing, adding, “*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ*” (Col 3:22-25).

Timothy was reminded to teach the same thing, with additional reasons being given. “*Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort*” (1 Tim 6:1-2). Note, it is assumed that the “*masters*” knew of the conversion of their slaves. If the slave’s religion caused him to disrespect his master, not giving them “*all honor,*” it would result in the master blaspheming the name of the Lord, as well as His teaching. Also, if the slave was blessed to have a believing master, he should not take advantage of the situation, supposing that less would now be required of him. Rather, he should serve with even more diligence, bringing a great blessing to his master, who was also his

brother.

Titus was also told of these things. “*Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things*” (Tit 2:9-10). The believing servant was to strive to please his master in everything, leaving no area in which he could be justly criticized. Neither, indeed, was the slave to “*answer again,*” being argumentative, or talking back. He was to respect his master’s goods, not “*purloining,*” or pilfering, taking small things from his master, thought to be inconsequential or without worth. Their irreproachable conduct would “*adorn the doctrine of God our Savior,*” proving it to be precisely what it affirms.

Why are servants told to be subject to their masters even if they are “*harsh,*” “*froward,*”^{KJV} “*unreasonable,*”^{NIV} or “*overbearing?*”^{NRSV} This is irrational to the flesh, but not to faith. God does not promise His people congenial masters and pleasant surroundings in this world. Remember, we are “*strangers and pilgrims*” here, and will soon be at home with the Lord. Whatever wrong a person does, whether master or slave, he “*shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons*” (Col 3:25). Those in the service of others are not to take matters into their own hands as though there was no God. God can make Potiphar favor Joseph the slave (Gen 39:1-4), or the prison keeper give honor to Joseph the prisoner (Gen 39:21-23). The Lord can move Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Darius to exalt the captive Daniel (Dan 2:48; 5:29; 6:2-3). It is a principle of the Kingdom of God that we commit the keeping of our souls to Him in “*well doing*” (1 Pet 4:19). Thus we entrust our case to Him alone.

These principles can be applied to those who are not slaves, yet are employed by others. Such should learn to be exemplary employees, not arguing, causing trouble, or taking what is not theirs. In so doing, they confirm the truth of the Gospel and show forth the character of the Lord Jesus Christ. Much in our society contradicts these things.

SOMETHING THAT IS COMMENDABLE

“^{2:19}For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.”^{KJV} Spiritual life not only differs from life in the flesh, it is diametrically opposed to it. In this expression we have another confirmation of this fact. In the world, it is commendable when we take what is coming to us, doing so without rebelling or complaining. But this is not commendable to God. Nor, indeed, is it laudable to simply endure undeserved suffering without voicing a complaint. Faith takes us farther than that. It always brings God into primary consideration.

Something that is “*commendable*” is “*thankworthy*”^{KJV}, bringing delight to the Lord and imparting loveliness to the sufferer. It brings the “*favor*”^{NIV} of God to the individual. Such a person experiences the “*approval*”^{RSV} of God, and receives “*credit for*”^{NRSV} the “*grief*” that is endured. It is as though a log is kept in heaven of all wrong doing against the people of God. It will all be corrected in due time, and is therefore to be patiently endured.

The word “*grief*” speaks of the hardships through which the saints pass. It is when Job loses all that he has, or Joseph is thrown into a pit and sold as a slave to the enemies of God. It is when Daniel is thrown to the lions, Peter is put into prison, or Moses despised by his brethren. It is when Stephen is stoned, or Paul placed into prison. Ultimately, it is when Jesus is led as a sheep dumb before the shearers. It is when “*a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly.*”^{NASB} This is when believers do what is right, yet are treated as though they were wrong. What is the “*commendable*” thing to do when this occurs?

Here is where faith comes into the picture. It produces a consciousness of God Himself, so that the “*grief*” is seen differently. It is perceived as “*light affliction, which is but for a moment,*” and

“is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17). The idea is that we regard God in our sorrow, not those who have wrongfully inflicted it upon us. That is why Stephen could pray for those who took his life: “Lord, do not charge them with this sin”^{NKJV} (Acts 7:60).

This is a circumstance where **God is served in suffering**—a strange concept to many. It devastates the idea of being angry or upset with God when we taste of the bitterness of life. Such a frame of mind is neither excusable nor acceptable. Far better to let the Spirit so minister to us through our faith that we are able to say with Paul, “Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong”^{NKJV} (2 Cor 12:9-10). This can only occur when we have a “conscience toward God.”

The person who lives with a primary concern toward men is thrust into a life of unbelief as well as misery. In that posture, he is cut off from the mercy of the Lord, and thus robbed of recourse to Him. No person will trust in the Lord who has no conscience “toward” Him. The conscience must be tutored by the Word of God, motivated by the promises of God, and fortified by faith in God. This is a “good conscience” (1 Tim 1:5), and one “without offense toward God and men” (Acts 24:16). This is another view of living by faith (Gal 2:20) and walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25).

Whenever we “suffer wrongfully,” we must remember how merciful God has been toward us. “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities”^{NKJV} (Psa 103:10). The recollection of this will help us to bear up under the unjust criticism and treatment of our enemies. It is still true, “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared”^{NKJV} (Psa 130:3-4). Further, we should not expect to dwell in a foreign land without incurring maltreatment from its citizens.

Lastly, this is the suffering in which we have fellowship with Christ—the “fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil 3:10). It is what qualifies us to reign with Christ (Rom 8:17). The presence of such “grief,” while not of itself pleasant, does confirm to us that we are in a foreign land, and that our citizenship is in heaven—and those are pleasant thoughts. There is grace to “endure grief wrongfully,” and we are free to obtain it in liberal measures.

LESSON #22

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{2:20}For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. ²¹For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: ²²Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth”^{KJV} (1 Pet 2:20-22)

INTRODUCTION

The life to which we have been called is one of *life more abundant* in the Spirit. It is **not** so in the body, however. Because we are strangers and pilgrims in the world, it cannot receive us. Although we submit to every form of ordained power and do good, still the world rejects us. We are not to be surprised when we suffer for righteousness' sake. Nor, indeed, are we to so structure our lives as to reduce the suffering that righteousness brings. The Spirit now reasons with us concerning the preceding statement: *“For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.”* He will show us how reasonable it is for God to recognize the value of unjust suffering, while not commending one for suffering justly. It is apparent that the Spirit desires that we understand the Kingdom principle that is now being declared. His teaching will confirm that we are, indeed, foreigners in this world, and thus must endure its hostilities. Whether they come from governments, associates, family, or even the church, we are not to be overcome by them. At this point we come into a vast fellowship of saints before us, other believers who have endured such things, and to the greatest of all, the Lord Jesus Himself.

WHEN WE ARE BUFFETED FOR OUR FAULTS

“^{2:20}For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?”^{KJV}
Men tend to boast when they are able to hold up under punishment or affliction that is due them. Thus men say “Take it like a man,” or “Grit your teeth and bear it.” But the Spirit is quick to apprise us that this is not virtuous, nor indeed, are we to recoil against such suffering, fighting back as though it was unjust. The word “*buffet*” means beating, or being whipped. It is not a pleasant word. The NKJV reads, *“For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently?”* The NIV reads, *“But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?”* Peter is not asking for an answer. This is a rhetorical question. That is, the answer is obvious. It is of NO glory, or credit, to us if we patiently endure the harshest punishment for doing wrong, or sinning.^{NASB} This does not agree with the world's view of things.

The word “*faults*” refers to sins, transgressions, and things we should NOT have done. It is **not** referring to weaknesses or infirmities. Being the sons of God does not mean we never are punished when we do wrong. The love of God does not always include passing over sins as though they did not occur. The nature of God is seen in His word to David concerning Solomon. *“I will be his father, and he shall be My son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men”* (2 Sam 7:14). The “*buffeting*” of which Peter speaks comes primarily from “*the rod of men*” and the “*children of men.*” Punishment is not always meted out by congenial spirits and kind-hearted brethren. Sometimes God raises up a heartless Nebuchadnezzar to punish His people. The Scriptures speak of the time *“when the LORD carried away Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar”* (1 Chron 6:15).

Taking due punishment, chastening, or buffeting “*patiently*” is enduring it without objecting, complaining, or fighting back. It is suffering it in a state of silence, laying, as it were, our hands upon our mouths. It is reacting like Job when he endured affliction. *“Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth”* (Job 40:4). David expressed the same spirit

when he became aware that God was chastening him. *“I was mute, I did not open my mouth, Because it was You who did it”*^{NKJV} (Psa 39:9). Solomon also spoke of a proper response when we are confronted with our wrong doing. *“If you have been foolish in exalting yourself, or if you have devised evil, put your hand on your mouth”*^{NKJV} (Prov 30:21).

Keep in mind, this is speaking of suffering for **wrongdoing**, and patiently enduring such suffering, miserable though it may be. Men account such an attitude to be meritorious and commendable. God does not. *“For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?”*^{NASB} Heavenly records are maintained with heavenly values in mind. It is understood that believers are not excluded from paying the penalty for wrongdoing. Even though our sins are forgiven, there are often grievous results to be borne because of them. David is a classic example. After being convicted of his sin with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan told him, *“The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.”* That was not all. He was also told the sword would never depart from his house, and evil would rise against him from his own household (2 Sam 12:9-14).

No reward will be given to us for bearing up under such punishment, whether it comes directly from the Lord or through the hands of men. It should be apparent that those who go from one trouble to another, recovering from one error after another, are not the closer to heaven for it. With everything that is within us, we must run to win the prize. It will not be given for enduring suffering and hardship because of our own foolishness or disobedience. To be sure, the Lord does forgive, but He also chastens. Too, He often uncovers our wrong doing to men who are over us, like He did the sin of Achan. When that occurs, let us take our just deserts patiently, knowing we will receive no credit for it. Then, strive to avoid wrongdoing and the just penalties for it.

DOING WELL AND SUFFERING FOR IT

“^{20b} . . . but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.”^{KJV} Practically speaking, the context of spiritual life is *“doing well,”* or *“good works.”* It should be noted that *“good works”* are never deprecated or downplayed in the Word of God. They are mentioned sixteen times in the Bible, and always in a commendable way (Matt 5:16; John 10:32; Acts 9:36; Rom 13:3; Eph 2:10; 1 Tim 2:10; 5:10,25; 6:18; 2 Tim 3:17; Tit 2:7,14; 3:8). Those in Christ are the product of God’s own work, and have been *“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”*^{NKJV} (Eph 2:10). The Spirit speaks of a faithful saying that is to be constantly affirmed: *“that those who have believed in God should be careful to **maintain good works**”* (Tit 3:8). While it is fashionable in some circles to speak derisively of good works, God always speaks favorably of them, urging us to continue in them.

A sophist might imagine that God would so bless the individual doing good that all men would respond favorably to it. But that is not at all the case. Remember, we are in a condemned world, and it has no love for *“good works”* or *“doing well.”* Frequently, men do what is good and right, and suffer from the world because of it. Thus, when Paul refused to be treated as a god, and declared the goodness of the true God, *“they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead”* (Acts 14:19). Also, when Paul and Silas delivered a woman from a spirit of divination, and preached the Gospel of Christ, the authorities in Philippi *“tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.*

And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely” (Acts 16:22-23).

The Lord Jesus is the ultimate specimen of the truth of this text. For example, after Jesus had

raised Lazarus from the dead, it is said of His enemies, “*from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death*” (John 11:53). Because the next verse will develop this more fully, I will save further comments for that section.

And what is to be the response of the people of God to such harsh and unjust treatment? They are to “*take it patiently,*” not threatening, not complaining, and not losing their grasp of the truth. They are to endure it knowing it is actually “*momentary*” and “*light*” in view of eternity (2 Cor 4:17). The recollection of other suffering brethren will also assist us to bear the burden, “*knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world*” (1 Pet 5:9).

Those who are not disoriented by unworthy suffering will be blessed. Has not Jesus said, “***Blessed*** are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ***Rejoice,*** and be ***exceeding glad:*** for ***great is your reward in heaven:*** for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt 5:11-12). The persuasion of this brings strength to the soul, to bear up under great grief.

When we suffer for doing well, we have a confirmation that we are not of this world. The suffering itself is our proof. Our Lord affirmed, “*If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*” (John 15:18-19). Thus, our suffering becomes precious evidence of Divine acceptance.

In bearing up when we suffer wrongfully, we are actually casting our burden upon the Lord, trusting in Him to correct the situation. Our faith enables us to fulfill this word of the Lord: “*Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you*” (1 Pet 5:7). Thus Paul and Silas could pray and sing in the cell (Acts 16:25), and the Apostles could depart from prison “*rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name*” (Acts 5:41). It is our faith that makes enduring unjust suffering commendable before God. That is why Stephen could pray for those who stoned him (Acts 7:60).

The people of God need much encouragement in this area. We live in a world that promotes self-interest and avenging one’s self. Such things are not acceptable to God. We need to hear of the value God has placed upon suffering wrongfully.

WE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO SUFFER

“^{2:21-22}***For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: ²²Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.***”^{KJV} Here we come to the core of the matter. **We have been called to suffer!** That is the appointed path to glory, taken by the Lord Himself. It was through His own suffering that Jesus “*learned obedience*” (Heb 5:8)—and all of His suffering was unjust! In the crucible of suffering a more keen sense of the Lord and His will is developed. Obedience is not cultured in a happy room, but in a suffering one. Even our blessed Lord occupied that room, doing so unjustly—not for His wrongdoing, but for ours.

To emphasize suffering when **good** is done, it is added, “*because Christ also suffered for us.*” The bitter agony and wrenching of soul that He experienced, was strictly for us. When His soul was “*exceeding sorrowful, even unto death*” (Matt 26:38), it was “*for us.*”

We have been called to suffer—brought into the “*fellowship of His sufferings.*” Seeing this, Paul abandoned all competing pursuits that he might experience “*the fellowship of His sufferings*” (Phil 3:10). It is true, “*the sufferings of Christ abound in us*” (2 Cor 1:5). We experience the world’s attitude toward our Lord, “*bearing His reproach*” (Heb 13:13). It is actually not our good works the world is responding to, but the life of Christ that is made known through them. Our works, or

well doing, are but a window through which the character of an unknown God is perceived by the world.

But why are we called to suffer? Were not Christ's sufferings sufficient? From one standpoint they are, and from another they are not. From the view of reconciling us to God and taking away our sins, they are wholly adequate. As it is written, "*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God*" (1 Pet 3:18). No further suffering is required to atone for sin or reconcile us unto God. But there is another aspect of Christ's suffering. A measure of it has been left behind for us. Paul expressed it this way, "*I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church*" (Col 1:24).

Here is an aspect of the *Christian life* that is not often declared. To the suffering Thessalonians Paul wrote, "*no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know*"^{NKJV} (1 Thess 3:3-4). **You cannot go to heaven without experiencing, to some degree, the rejection of this world.** It is spiritual travail that attends leaving this world and entering the world to come. As we are being "*changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another*"^{RSV} (2 Cor 3:18), suffering is involved, just as it is in childbirth. The suffering, in fact, confirms the process is taking place, praise the Lord.

The way to the throne leads through the valley of suffering. As it is written, "*The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together*"^{NKJV} (Rom 8:16-17). Should you not be able to bear up patiently under unworthy suffering in prospect of being an heir of God and joint heir with Christ? Indeed, we can say with Paul, "*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*" (Rom 7:17).

Now, look to the Lord as your example. He left a pattern for us to follow. He "*did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth.*" He was led like a Lamb to the slaughter, yet "*He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth*" (Isa 53:9). Again it is written, "*He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not his mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth*" (Isa 53:7). That is what it means to "*take it patiently.*" And consider Jesus now. Is He oppressed any longer? Indeed not, for God has highly exalted Him. That confirms His regard for "*suffering wrongfully.*" Because Jesus did the greatest good and suffered the greatest wrong, He was exalted to the highest position. Remember as you suffer for doing what is good, your time is coming also. You too will be exalted in due season. Believe it.

LESSON #23

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Pet 2:22-25, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

In his strong exhortation to live godly and bear up under persecution and hardship, Peter takes us back to Christ. He shows us that the Gospel contains all of the incentives required to live honorably before the Lord. The secret to godliness and lives that are brightly shining lights is not found in human discipline, but in faith in the Lord. Thus he bases his exhortation upon the Gospel—specifically what occurred when Christ died, and what happened when we believed that Gospel. Godly preaching, teaching, and exhortation never get far from the Gospel of Christ. That Good News is the seasoning agent for all proper stimuli. At the point our reasoning fails to make much of the Gospel, it becomes futile and spiritually powerless. God has no word for us that is not connected to the Gospel. There are no effective exhortations that do not have an obvious and immediate association with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

HE COMMITTED HIMSELF TO GOD

“^{2:23} Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.”^{NKJV} Our text is a strong exhortation to refrain from avenging ourselves, or retaliating when unjust suffering is leveled against us. With great care, the Apostle avoids philosophizing about the matter. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, he brings us back to the supreme example—the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him, and in Him alone, dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col 2:9). In Him, therefore, the manner in which Divine life reacts in this world is revealed.

To “*revile*” is to assail, rail at, or abuse in words. It is to speak against someone, deriding them and speaking harshly against them. It involves hurling insults at enemies, and speaking derisively of them. When Jesus was crucified, people reviled Him. “*And they that passed by reviled Him, wagging their heads, and saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save Thyself. If Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross*” (Matt 27:39-40). At one point, even the thieves “*that were crucified with Him reviled Him*” (Mk 15:32). Jesus did not respond with abusive words—something flesh is prone to do. Instead, He cried out, “*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*” (Lk 23:34). Following the Lord’s example, Paul confessed, “*being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we entreat*” (1 Cor 4:12). Jesus taught, “*bless them that curse you*” (Matt 5:44). Elsewhere the Spirit says, “*Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not*” (Rom 12:14). Later Peter will exhort us to not “*render railing for railing*” (1 Pet 3:9). We also have the example of Michael the archangel, who did not even rail against the devil himself. “*Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee*” (Jude 9). **Reviling is never in order. Far better to calmly bear wrongs and refuse to revenge injustices against us, particularly when they are “for righteousness sake.”**

Our Lord did not “*threaten*” His oppressors, even though He was superior to them, and was going to judge them. He refused to do battle in the flesh. A classic example is when He was arrested in the garden. Although He could have asked the Father for “*more than twelve legions of angels*” (Matt 26:53), He “*threatened not.*” He would not do combat in the flesh, or take matters into His

own hands.

The fact that Jesus did not revile or threaten His enemies, however, is not to be taken as meaning He did nothing. Their cause was unjust, and their vituperations against Him were sinful. He was not complacent about the matter but *“committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.”* This was fulfilled when Jesus cried out, *“Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit”*^{NKJV} (Lk 23:46). The Living God would adjudicate His cause, and do so righteously. No transgression or sensitivity of heart would be overlooked.

It is ever to be remembered that God Himself is our Defender. As it is written, *“My defense is of God, Who saves the upright in heart . . . I will wait for You, O You his Strength; For God is my defense . . . To You, O my Strength, I will sing praises; For God is my defense, My God of mercy”*^{NKJV} (Psa 7:10; 59:9,17). Jesus reminded us that God will *“avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?”* (Lk 18:7-8). That faith is expressed in committing ourselves to Him.

Vengeance belongs to God, and to God alone. As it is written, *“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord. And again, The LORD will judge His people”* (Heb 10:30; Psa94:1). To take matters into our own hands, therefore, is intruding into things that belong to God. This does not mean the matter will be ignored, or that it is being overlooked by the Lord. It does mean it will be judged righteously by God Himself, who will handle our case for us. When the wicked heap harsh treatment upon us, we are to *“leave room for God's wrath”* (Rom 12:19), not taking matters into our own hands. This is an aspect of faith that Satan will tempt us to think is not necessary. However, when we consider our Lord, and His reaction to His enemies, it will strengthen our hearts to follow His example.

VICARIOUS ATONEMENT

“Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness; by whose stripes you were healed.”^{NKJV} The Spirit avoids teaching us in a cold and heartless manner. There is life in the words of the Lord (John 6:63). Now the Spirit will show us the results of Christ's sufferings, and how God righteously brought fruit from them.

If we are tempted to think too much of our suffering as unwarranted, let us ponder the sufferings of our Lord. Were it not for Him being a sin-bearer, He would not have suffered at all! Here is one of the most concise expressions of atonement in all of Scripture. Jesus *“bore our sins in His own body on the tree.”* Isaiah said, *“Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows . . . the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all”* (Isa 53:4-6). This was a very real transaction. This was sin in its totality—all of it. It was placed upon Christ, or carried in His body, in order that He might take it away. When Jesus was born, He was *“God manifest in the flesh.”* When He died, He was the incarnation of sin, for God *“made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin”* (2 Cor 5:21). God localized sin in Jesus in order that He might judge it, condemning it in the flesh of His Son (Rom 8:3).

This is vicarious, or substitutionary, atonement. It is one Person bearing the blame for the whole race, taking the responsibility for the sins of the world. As Isaiah said it, *“He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him”* (Isa 53:5). The sins of humanity were not dealt with one by one, or person by person. Rather, they were addressed in their entirety, or in the aggregate. Jesus literally took *“away the sin (singular) of the world”* (John 1:29).

This is the only way the power of sin could be destroyed. This is confirmed by the result of Christ's death: ***“that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.”*** The matter of our death

to sin is a critical one, and is often emphasized in Scripture. It is something that must be grasped by faith, for human reason cannot confirm this to be true. In Romans 6:2, the Spirit reasons, “*How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?*” He reasons that this has freed us from the dominion of sin. “*For he who has died has been freed from sin*” (6:7). We are further urged to believe this, reasoning in the Spirit. “*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin*” (6:11). In a sense, when our sins were borne by Jesus in His body, we also died with Him. As it is written, “*if One died for all, then all died*” (2 Cor 5:14). And again, “*Now if we died with Christ*” (Rom 6:8).

The effectiveness of Christ’s substitutionary death is seen in its results: “*that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.*” This is also stated elsewhere. “*That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God . . . that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again*” (1 Pet 4:2; 2 Cor 5:15). The individual who is not living for God has **not** been affected by the death of Christ, and is not reconciled to God. If sin was condemned in Jesus in order that we might be freed from its power and live unto God, then those remaining in its power and not living for God cannot claim identity with Christ.

“*. . . by whose stripes you were healed.*” The healing of reference has to do with sin, not bodily health. The cause of the healing is the suffering of Christ, and the result of it is returning to the Shepherd of our souls. Thus the Psalmist cried out, “*Heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee*” (Psa 41:4). The death of Christ, with all of its attending sufferings, could not be for sickness, for sickness did not alienate men from God—only sin does that. Sickness does not require atonement, and is nowhere so represented. Further, the “*stripes*” of reference are not those administered by men, but those given by God. **It is what GOD did to Jesus that brought atonement, not what men did to Him** (Rom 8:32)! The effects of sin were “*healed*” by the Divine stroke laid upon the Son. For those who believe, it is no longer able to keep them from coming to God and living for Him. This has no bearing whatsoever on the availability of bodily healing to the saints. That remains a blessing for His people. But that type of healing is not related to Christ’s atoning death.

THE GLORIOUS RESULT

“²⁵ *For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*”^{NKJV} In further justification of the type of healing accomplished in the chastening of Christ for us, the Spirit affirms its results. When we stood in need of healing, we “*were like sheep going astray,*” wandering aimlessly in the maze of sin and transgression. We had no sense of direction, and were getting further and further from God. Apart from Divine intervention, we were in a hopeless condition. As Isaiah said, “*All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*” (Isa 53:6). Only the resolution of sin could correct our situation. That is precisely why God laid on Jesus “*the iniquity of us all.*” Apart from that decisive action, we could not return to the Lord.

We see how corrupt sin had made mankind. When man turned “*to his own way,*” he was shut up to sin and iniquity. That is what “*going astray*” means—following our own will. What is even more, sin so dulled the conscience that it forced man into a condition where he had no basic desire to return to God. That is why God intervened. As it is written, “*Therefore My own arm brought salvation for Me*” (Isa 63:5).

Further emphasizing that the healing mentioned pertains to the soul, the Spirit adds, “*but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer [Bishop, KJV] of your souls.*” Salvation involves voluntarily coming under the direction and feeding of the Lord Jesus Christ. Because all authority is given to Him, He is the “*Chief Shepherd*” (1 Pet 5:2). Because His shepherding is for our benefit, and is one of deep concern and love, He is the “*Good Shepherd*” (John 10:11). Because of the extensiveness and effectiveness of His work, He is the “*Great Shepherd*” (Heb 13:20). The

Shepherd of our souls is the Point of entering into the fold, or presence of the Lord (John 10:2). He laid down His life in consideration of the sheep (John 10:11). He knows His sheep, and they know Him (John 10:14).

While the Shepherd supplies our bodily needs, His primary ministry is to our “*souls*”—the unseen part of our persons. As the “*Shepherd of our souls*” He pastors, or nourishes our inward parts. As the “*Overseer*” or Bishop of our souls, He is the Divinely appointed Director or Superintendent of them. “*Shepherd*” emphasizes feeding and protection, while “*Overseer*” or “*Bishop*” accentuates leading, or giving direction. In my opinion, this aspect of salvation has been almost totally obscured by institutional religion. I find relatively few believers in possession of a lively awareness of this role of Christ.

There is an important thing to be seen in this verse. Apart from returning to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, we are confined to going astray—wandering away from the presence of the Lord. Our status before God is not maintained automatically, but by the Lord Jesus. **We are not locked into a relationship with God, but directed and nourished into it.** That is why the day of salvation is also described as the time when the Lord has “*succored,*” nourished, or helped us (2 Cor 6:2). **Spiritual malnutrition will result in a wandering soul.** If this were not the case, it would not have been necessary for us to “*return to the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.*” Those who are not ruled and directed by Christ are “*out of the way*” (Heb 5:2). Those returning from that wayward path are said to be “*healed.*” “*And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed*” (Heb 12:13).

As elementary as it may seem, it bears repeating. God has nothing to offer us that does not come through Jesus Christ. Too, Christ will not minister those requirements to those who are not in “*fellowship*” with Him (1 Cor 1:9). Our returning to Christ for protection, feeding, and direction, is said to be “*NOW*” – “*but have NOW returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*” It is a present one, not something that occurred in the past.

Thus we learn that **neither a return to Christ nor remaining in and with Him were possible without His atoning death.** See what marvelous things flowed from the sufferings of Christ! You are to believe that glorious things will also result from your sufferings. In the persuasion of this, you will be able to bear up under the injustices of men, knowing that God determines outcomes, not man.

LESSON #24

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:1} Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,² when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.³ Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel;⁴ rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.⁵ For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands,⁶ as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.” (1 Pet 3:1-6, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The word of God is quick, or living, and powerful, probing the heart and discovering its thoughts and intents (Heb 4:12). It moves across both time and culture, and views life from a heavenly perspective. Because of this, there are some remarkably practical sections in Scripture. They deal with the details of life, and are intensely personal and serious. One such passage is before us. The Spirit has addressed those under government. He has mentioned political government. The relationship of masters to servants has been mentioned. Now He comes to domestic interrelation. He is elaborating on the matter of committing ourselves to God, and accepting our station in life with faith and peace. The matter of our relationship to God is primary in all of these considerations. For this reason, the people of God will be able to accept them joyfully, without fear of oppression.

WIVES, BE SUBMISSIVE IN THE SAME WAY

“^{2:23} Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,² when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.”^{NKJV} At the very outset of this text, I want to point out that the Spirit is **not** speaking to husbands about their wives. All believers are to devote themselves to developing godly traits in their own persons, not seeking to develop them in others, while neglecting their own responsibilities before God.

The words “*likewise,*” or “*in the same way,*”^{NASB} mean, in the same way as subjects to kings (2:13-14), servants to masters (2:18-19), and Jesus to God (2:22-23). Everyone is subordinate to someone. That is the way the Lord has placed us in this world. No soul is free of responsibility. Children are subject to parents (Eph 6:1), and even the holy angels are subject to God (Psa 103:20). Every personality is to accept the role in which God has placed them, and to do so without rejecting that place and seeking their own interests.

This passage is not to become the source of contention among the people of God. The Scriptures speak to this matter too clearly for there to be any question about it. Wives are to be submissive to **their own** husbands. This is a submission that is to be done in respect of the Lord. “*Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord*” (Eph 5:22). It is a way of serving and honoring the Lord. The relationship is also mirrored in the church, and is to be respected. “*Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing*” (Eph 5:24).

To be submissive is to be subordinate, or willingly in subjection. It is not the business of the husband to subdue the wife, but for the wife to yield her will, even as Jesus did to the will of God. This is one of the results of the original sin. God said to Eve, “*I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he*

will rule over you”^{NIV} (Gen 3:16). The relationship considered, therefore, is one of Divine appointment, and is not to be questioned.

As with all earthly relationships, subordination does not allow for the transgression of God’s law. When the King, governor, master, or husband demands conduct that requires disobedience to God, the subordinate is to “*obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29).

The Spirit adds a dimension here that reveals how closely God is aligned with those who honor His appointments. If a wife has an unbelieving husband, she is not to withhold her subjection as though it no longer was binding upon her. Instead, she is to consider that through her holy life, her husband may be won over “*without the word.*” In such a case, she becomes “*the epistle of Christ . . . written . . . by the Spirit of the living God*” (2 Cor 3:3). The power of a transformed life is to be considered. It cannot be hidden, any more than men can hide a city set upon a hill (Matt 5:14). This is not a guarantee that the unbelieving husband will be won over to Christ. However, the wife in such a circumstance is to hear the words of the Spirit. “*For how do you know, O wife, whether you will save your husband?*” (1 Cor 7:16). This is an opportunity where God can work, and is to be so regarded. Wayward husbands are better drawn by holy conduct than nagging words.

“*Without the word*” does not mean the Gospel will play no role in the husband coming to Christ. It rather means that he will be drawn into interest by beholding his wife.

Holy behavior is a context in which the Holy Spirit works. This is seen in the words, “*While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.*” Chaste conversation is spiritual and moral purity—lives that are above reproach and not tainted by the world. It should not be necessary to say this type of life is to be found in all believers, not only wives of unbelieving husbands. The holy life is also “*coupled with fear,*” or the utmost respect for God and His will. This is a fear that is obvious. It is apparent to the beholder that the individual has a high regard for the Lord of glory, yielding to His will even in the most unfavorable of circumstances.

Holy living “*adorns the doctrine*” (Tit 2:10), proving it to be from God. Many a person has been turned away from the doctrine by beholding waywardness in the ones professing it. This passage has a great deal of relevance for our time.

SPIRITUAL APPROACH TO ADORNMENT

“³*Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel;* ⁴*rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.*”^{NKJV} This is an elaboration on the conduct of the wife that results in the husband being “*won without a word.*” The language, however, is not confined to the relationship of husband and wife, as will become apparent in the fourth verse.

The Spirit is not outlining a law for how women appear, but showing where the focus of attention is to be placed. Nor, indeed, are the things mentioned prohibited for women, as some have taught. However, when any of these things become the primary means of adornment, the heart and mind are not discerning.

“*Adornment*” means “well arranged,” decoration, or embellishment—the thing that makes the individual attractive. The text assumes the value of attractiveness, but unveils to us the superior way for that to be accomplished. The Spirit mentions three areas of consideration: the hair, jewelry, and apparel. In each case, excessiveness is the point. Elsewhere, the woman’s hair is said to be her “*glory,*” or sign of dignity (1 Cor 11:15). Abraham’s servant gave Isaac’s prospective wife a golden ring weighing about ½ ounce, and two gold bracelets weighing about four ounces (Gen 24:22). The virtuous woman is depicted as having clothing of “*silk and purple*” (Prov 31:22). Of themselves,

none of these things are sinful. However, when they are thought to be the source of true beauty, they have become a distraction. The unbelieving husband is not won by such apparel. This text is instruction in wearing “*modest apparel.*” Paul gives similar instruction in First Timothy. “*I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments; but rather by means of good works, as befits women making a claim to godliness*” (2:9-10). Modest, or proper, clothing is in harmony with the profession of godliness, and does not detract from it. No honor is brought to Christ by clothing that clashes with a profession of godliness.

The Spirit takes us to the heart of the matter. It is the relationship with the Lord that is to be cultured, so that the “*hidden person of the heart*” is characterized by a beauty that does not fade or diminish. The “*hidden person of the heart*” is the “*inward man*” (Rom 7:22; 2 Cor 4:16). It is where the Holy Spirit resides (Eph 3:16), and where the Law of God has been written (Heb 10:16). Above all else, this is the part that is to be cultured, nurtured, and adorned with the graces of the Spirit.

The aspects of adornment are worthy of special note: “*a gentle (meek) and quiet spirit.*” These are not common traits, even among believers—but they should be. These are “*adornment,*” something that must be put on. They are described as “*incorruptible beauty,*” or an attractiveness that does not wane with age.

Gentleness is a Divine quality, and much to be coveted. It is a virtue that makes the individual “*great*” (Psa 18:5). It is the opposite of being abrasive and harmful. It is also humility that refuses to thrust self into the limelight. It is also a mild disposition, seen most fully in Jesus: i.e., “*I am meek and lowly in heart . . . my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*” (Matt 11:29). Gentleness, or meekness, refuses to inflict willful pain upon others.

To have a “**quiet spirit**” is to be in a state of spiritual calmness. The presence of this precious quality brings strength, and is always accompanied by confidence (Isa 30:15). The “*quiet*” person knows the Lord is present, and thus does not fear what man will do (Heb 13:5-6). With deliberation, believers are to “*study to be quiet*” (1 Thess 4:11), to be calm and without agitation within. The fact that this is a considerable accomplishment accounts for it being “*in the sight of God of great price.*”

Laboring to possess a gentle and quiet spirit may appear to put the wife at a disadvantage. At least, that is how the flesh thinks. But it does not, for it puts the Lord on the side of the godly woman. The wife who seeks to adorn herself with such inward beauty gains the greatest advantage in every way.

THE EXAMPLE OF WOMEN OF OLD

“⁵*For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, ⁶as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.*”^{NKJV} As is characteristic of the Spirit, He presses the teaching so as to make flesh most uncomfortable. He will give no honor to the opinions of men who kick against the teaching of the Lord. Thus He summons saints of old to our consideration.

The Lord does not draw our attention to the great women of the world, but to those who “*trusted in God.*” As simplistic as this may appear, the people of God must refrain from viewing the unregenerate as their ultimate examples. If they want notable patterns or models, let them find them among those who have placed their trust in the Lord. In this case, we are reminded of “*the holy women.*” What a refreshing term! Not only, therefore, does God employ “*holy men*” (2 Pet 1:21), but “*holy women*” as well. In my opinion, the adoption of such language in the average church would transform its concept of ladies’ meetings and fellowships. Our world stands in need

of some “*holy women.*”

Ponder some of the “*holy women*” of old. Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Ruth, Hannah, Jochebed, Miriam, Abigail, and Debra. Of particular note is the phrase, “*being submissive to their own husbands.*” Like the virtuous woman of Proverbs thirty-one, their husbands trusted safely in them, were made more known because of them, and praised them (vs 11,23,28). They were all noted for the faith, gentleness, and quietness. Their faith in God made them great, affecting their whole persons. They depended upon the Lord, and brought great honor to His name. Since Christ’s entrance into the world, there have also been some great and unforgettable women. Elizabeth, Mary, Dorcas, Anna, Lydia, Priscilla, Phebe, Lois, and Eunice. These are established examples for young ladies to consider and follow.

But of them all, we are called to consider Sarah, because she is the mother of the faithful. She “*obeyed Abraham,*” going with him from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan (Gen 12:5), down into Egypt (Gen 12:10-14), and even into the land of the Philistines (Gen 20:1-2). This did not mean she was Abraham’s slave, for on one occasion God directed Abraham, “*in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice*” (Gen 21:12). It does mean her general manner was to obey her husband.

The Spirit then refers to Sarah calling Abraham “*lord.*” The reference is no doubt to Genesis 18:12, where Sarah questioned her ability to have Isaac. “*Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?*” This was not disrespect for Abraham, but the eruption of unbelief. Still, even in that outburst, she had the highest regard for her husband. The text shows that Sarah believed what God had said to Eve, “*Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you*” (Gen 3:16). “*Rule*” does not mean ruthlessness or abuse, but responsibility and care.

To be a “*daughter*” of Sarah is to be in a most noble lineage! Here is a critical note. The relation of godly wives to Sarah is not in slavish and heartless obedience to their husbands. “*You have become her children if you **do what is right** without being frightened by any fear.*”^{NASB} **Doing what is right** involves submitting to the husband. It also involves inward adornment, which is especially precious to God. A submissive wife who has not cultured her inward person has gained no advantage, and is not a daughter of Sarah. A woman who has adorned her inward person will do what the text directs, and will be blessed of God for it. For all believers--women and men--doing right is never wrong, and doing wrong is never right! To put it another way, God will never bless the wrongdoer, and will never ignore the one who does right.

When the wife is “*not afraid with any terror*” or amazement^{KJV}, she is not afraid of being put at a disadvantage by obeying the Lord. God will not abandon her in her obedience, nor will her husband gain undue advantage over her because of it. This is a very sensitive text, and is not to be the subject of strong controversy and the making of harsh rules. It is addressed to wives. God leaves it in their hands, and so must we.

LESSON #25

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:7}Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.” (1 Pet 3:7, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Why are such practical matters mentioned in the midst of lofty expositions of the Gospel of Christ? For some, they are too mundane to be considered. The reason for their mention relates to the purpose for the Gospel. It is to bring us into fellowship with God by announcing that a satisfactory atonement has been made for our sin and sinfulness. That fellowship takes place in the details of life itself. Eternal life is “*knowing*” God (John 17:3), and that is neither seasonal nor confined to a certain place. Concourse with the Lord takes place in the circumstances of life: i.e., subjects of governors, masters and subordinates, children and parents, and husbands and wives. These aspects of life are not divorced from intimacy with God and Christ. They actually become the context in which rich fellowship with the Father and Son are realized. While all of these earthly relationships are temporal, they are a sort of classroom in which we can experience Divine direction, tutelage, empowerment, and blessing. They are areas in which spiritual progress can be made.

HUSBANDS, DWELL WITH THEM IN UNDERSTANDING

“^{7a}Husbands, likewise, dwell with them [your wives] with understanding.” NKJV The word “*likewise*” ties this exhortation to the general word, “*Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king*” (v 17). Salvation elevates our associations with our peers, whether they be humanity in general, those in Christ Jesus, kings, or our spouses. Husbands are not excluded from mutual responsibilities and considerations. At no point will the Spirit allow us to think we are only the recipients of honor and respect. Husbands are obligated by the very nature of spiritual life to be respectful of their wives. As we will see, this directly correlates with their association with both God and Christ.

“Dwell with them.” The word “*dwell*” means to reside together, fulfilling all of the responsibilities associated with that relationship. It is more than occupying the same residence. There is activity and interest involved. It is the same concept introduced in Ephesians 2:22. “*In whom [Christ Jesus] ye also are **buildded together** for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*” In the case of believers, they are molded together as a place for God to reside through the Spirit. There is purpose to the togetherness, mutual obligations are fulfilled, and God is glorified. So it is with godly husband. In dwelling with his wife, a purpose is served that brings glory to the Lord. He is a provider, sustainer, encourager, and protector of the wife. All of that is involved in dwelling with his wife.

When God created man and woman, His intention was spelled out. “*Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh*” (Gen 2:24). Jesus enforced this word, commanding that men not seek to divide what God has joined together (Matt 19:5-6). Solomon mentioned rejoicing with the wife of our youth (Prov 5:18). Again he said, “*Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity*” (Eccl 9:9). In the marital bond, troubles are halved, and joys are doubled. Although many have experienced heartbreak in marriage, that is not God’s intentions. His design is to bring advantages by the union of a husband and wife. The husband is to acknowledge this by abiding with his wife in a God-honoring manner.

“In understanding.” The Spirit is not calling for husbands to merely fulfill a responsibility.

The KJV reads, “*according to knowledge.*” This is understood to be a higher form of knowledge, and not a mere intellectual acquaintance with mutual obligations. To be sure, it is their duty to dwell with their wives, but their heart and mind must be in the matter. They are to abide with them in “*an understanding way,*”^{NASB} or *considerately*. The text is not urging husbands to dwell with their wives in a cold and intellectual way, but in a manner involving the heart. Other versions read, “*live considerately with your wives,*”^{RSV} “*show consideration for your wives in your life together,*”^{NRSV} and “*be considerate as you live with your wives.*”^{NIV}

The ultimate example of this tender relationship is found in Christ and the church. In a very poignant way, the Spirit says, “*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church*” (Eph 5:25,28,29). “*With understanding,*” or “*considerately,*” involves selflessness. In such a relationship, the husband transfers the self concern for himself to the interests of his wife.

“*In understanding*” involves having a heavenly perspective of the situation. That is the sort of view that must dominate every human relationship. The “*knowledge of God,*” which is integral to salvation (John 17:3; Jer 31:34), touches upon every aspect of life in this world. Our acquaintance with God (Job 22:21) will bring influences to bear upon our domestic lives. Many of us could do much better in this area, and must be encouraged to do so. If the Lord has told husbands to live with their wives in a considerate and thoughtful manner, it is sin not to do so. Here is an area where Satan can gain a foothold in our lives. He is to be resisted in faith when husbands are tempted to be inconsiderate, or allow less attentiveness to their wives than to their own persons. We will find that domestic life has a direct bearing and impact upon our walk with the Lord.

GIVING HONOR TO THE WIFE AS HEIRS TOGETHER

“^{7b} . . . *giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life . . .*”^{NKJV} In approaching a text like this, we must take care not to use it to diagnose wives as being inferior to the husband. Should this imagination be entertained, it will not be possible to “*give honor to the wife.*” The word “*honor*” is an unusually strong one. It means valuable, highly esteemed, giving dignity, and regarding the wife as precious and beyond price. It is said of a virtuous woman, “*The heart of her husband safely trusts her; So he will have no lack of gain. She does him good and not evil all the days of her life*”^{NKJV} (Prov 31:11-12). Giving honor to the wife involves a recognition of that circumstance. The husband who honors his wife knows “*it is not good for man to be alone*” (Gen 2:18a). He realizes that when God provided man with a wife, it was an appropriate provision—exactly what he needed. “*I will make him a helper suitable for him*”^{NASB} (Gen 2:18b). The RSV reads “*a helper fit for him.*” The NKJV reads, “*comparable to him.*” Man was not provided a slave, but a helper—one to come along side of him and assist him in fulfilling the appointed will of the Lord. Honoring the wife involves a recognition of that fact. Honor is to be “*given*” to the wife. She is to be aware her husband honors her, and he is to speak honorably of her. This is seen in Christ’s care for the church.

“**The weaker vessel.**” Here is an expression that has become greatly distorted. The various versions do little to clarify what is intended. Nor, indeed, does a mere study of the word “*weaker*” yield the intended meaning. To assist us in seeing the intent of the Spirit, it is necessary to consider how the Lord spoke of the creation of man and woman. Together, they projected the image of God. From the standpoint of the Divine imagery in humanity, they are not two separate images, but a single one. “*This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; Male and female created he **them**; and blessed **them**, and called **their name** Adam, in the day when **they** were created*” (Gen 5:1-2). “*Man,*” or mankind, or humanity, does not consist of men only, but of men and women. That must be seen to comprehend this

statement.

“*Weaker*” does not mean inferior, or to be despised. It is not a fleshly distinction, nor does it suggest women have a shorter life span. Nor, indeed, does it propound they fall apart more easily, or are less stable emotionally. On one occasion, Sarah stood strong when Abraham did not (Gen 21:9-12), and once Zipporah, wife of Moses, excelled him in discernment (Ex 4:24-26). “*Weaker*” involves something that **appears** to be weak, but actually is not. The word is used this way in 1 Corinthians 1:25. “*The weakness of God is stronger than men.*” And again, “*God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty*” (1 Cor 1:27). Further, we learn from the members of the body of Christ, that what appears to be more feeble is nevertheless necessary. “*Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary*” (1 Cor 12:22).

This “*weakness*” is, in my understanding, the accentuation of certain Divine qualities within the woman: tenderness, compassion, mercy, and sensitivity. God did not reflect the total Divine image in man alone, but placed measures in both the man and women. It is not that these traits are exclusive to each of them. Rather certain ones are accented in both the man and the woman. Those within the woman are to be duly noted by the husband, and she is to be given honor because of it. This type of sensitivity is seen in the woman that ministered to Jesus (Mk 15:41), Mary Magdelene (Mk 16:9), the woman who poured the ointment upon Jesus (Matt 26:7), and the Syrophenician woman (Mk 7:26-30).

“**Heirs together.**” Here is a most wonderful *expression*: “*a fellow heir of the grace of life.*”^{NASB} Some of this life pertains to this world, and some to the world to come—but both husband and wife are called to partake of them. There is an equality in Christ that is to be treasured, for in Him there is neither male nor female (Gal 3:28). All of the benefits of salvation are available to the wife, and her husband is to honor her with that in mind. It makes a great difference how men treat their wives when they consider them a “*joint heir of life.*” The spiritual life of the husband can be greatly enriched by the wife.

THAT YOUR PRAYERS BE NOT HINDERED

“^{7c} . . . *that your prayers may not be hindered.*”^{NKJV} The importance of maintaining godly lives in marital relationships is confirmed in this text. This corroborates that life in Christ permeates every relationship of life in this world. Our harmony, or lack thereof, with the Lord in every area of life has a direct bearing upon how heaven regards us. In particular, the Spirit mentions the prayers of a husband. It is true, “*The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*” (James 5:16). It is also true that the prayers of an inconsiderate husband are “*hindered.*” They are “*hindered*” by the impact of his thoughtless treatment of his own wife. Whether in public or private, men are to pray “*lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*” (1 Tim 2:8). If men despise the gifts given to them by God (of which a good wife is one—Prov 10:22), their prayers will, at the very least, be “*hindered.*”

What does it mean for prayers to be “*hindered?*” It means they are frustrated, cut down, and not allowed to bring forth fruit! Take, for example, the prayers of Job’s friends. God did not hear them because of their contentious spirit against Job. But of Job God said, “*my servant Job shall pray for you: for him will I accept*” (Job 42:8). Again, showing the bearing that earthly relationships can have upon heavenly ones, Jesus said: “*Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift*” (Matt 5:23-24). Much more will the lack of honor for a “*joint heir*” of the grace of life make our prayers pointless and vain. If the prayers of husbands are not heard, due thought should be given to how they have honored their wives.

But this text is not limited to the husbands. The expression “*your prayers*” may also include the wives. Consider the possibilities of prayer that are open to a husband and wife that “*agree.*” Remember the words of the Lord Jesus. “*Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven*” (Matt 18:19). What principle of thought is there that would exclude a husband and wife agreeing on a matter, and claiming this promise?

There is a priority here that must be seen. The fundamental relationship is not that of husband and wife, but of the individual with God. Notice the perspective that is powerfully developed. The purpose of the husband giving due honor to the wife, holding her in high regard, is not that the home may be peaceful—although that no doubt will result. It is not that they might set a good example to any children that may be present, although that is also involved. The real objective, however, is not to allow any hindering influence to come between ourselves and the Lord. Our prayers, for example, are not to be viewed as a mere perfunctory service. They are rather a means of bringing Divine influence to bear upon our lives in this world. We should not only fight against any tendency to neglect prayer, but see to it that our lives do not cause them to be “*hindered.*”

Prayer requires calmness and peace within the soul. An agitated or inconsiderate soul cannot offer powerful prayers. It stands to reason that if the husband and wife are at peace with each other, their prayers will have more power. There is a time when husbands and wives may abstain from the normalities of marriage in order to give themselves to prayer and fasting. However, the Spirit very carefully words instruction on this matter. “*Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control*”^{NKJV} (1 Cor 7:5). Notice the mutuality involved—“*with consent.*” Behold the consideration—“*for a time . . . come together again.*” There are times when special prayer and fasting take the precedence. But even then, care must be taken not to awaken undue temptation within each other.

We have considered a very powerful and practical text. It is quite possible for it to bring conviction upon the heart of husbands. But they must not despair, or stand in a pool of shame. Let them run quickly to the Savior for cleansing, and power to fulfill their role in life to the honor of the Lord who loved them and gave Himself for them.

LESSON #26

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:8} Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.” (1 Pet 3:8-9, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

One of the secrets to the strength and effectiveness of the body of Christ is its unity. When the wicked join together, they become nearly invincible. That is why God disrupted the building of the tower of Babel. *“Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them”* (Gen 11:6). In Christ, however, unity, or oneness, is blessed by God, and brings much glory to Him. The Spirit now reasons with us on this matter, urging us to be of benefit to one another, and to be a source of blessing, even to those who spitefully use us. This manner of thinking is strange to the flesh, and is seen as a liability rather than an advantage. We can therefore gauge our own progress in the faith by our response to this admonition. If it seems unreasonable to us, as something that puts us at a disadvantage, we are in the flesh. If, however, we see the sense of it, and are drawn to see it fulfilled in our lives, it is because we are in the Spirit. Again, we are speaking of very practical aspects of our lives. Yet, they are areas in which Divine fellowship and blessing are realized.

EVERY ONE BEING OF ONE MIND

“^{3:8a} Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another . . .” NKJV

The word “*finally*” means, “to sum up what I have been saying.” What the Spirit says here is a spiritually logical conclusion to what has been declared to this point. **The truth of God, when embraced by faith, does lead to reasonable conclusions.** Faulty teaching leads to faulty conclusions and the embrace of erroneous principles. This is a test of whether or not the truth has been embraced: what conclusions did the doctrine produce?

The admonition is not confined to teachers, or to the ones being taught; the leaders, or the ones being led. Here is something for everyone: *“ALL of you.”* The younger are not excluded. The husbands and the wives are embraced, the master and the servant: *“all of YOU.”* This is another principle of the Kingdom, and is consistent throughout the Word of God: **the fundamental responsibilities of men, and central teachings of God’s word apply to all of the body of Christ.** When the Word of God addresses specific categories of people, the teaching is generally very brief. A quick return is made to the central matters.

“Be of one mind.” Here is a blessed condition that is rarely realized in the professed church. Nor, indeed, is it held in high regard. Ponder how frequently this admonition is found in Scripture. *“be of one mind . . . stand fast in one spirit, with one mind . . . being of one accord, of one mind . . . Be of the same mind . . . be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment . . . be of the same mind in the Lord”* (2 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; Rom 12:15; 1 Cor 1:10; Phil 4:2). This is not something that is optional, nor is it an elevated status that can only be realized by a few. This is a household benefit.

In God’s Kingdom there is only one valid mind-set. It is *“the mind of Christ,”* or *“the mind of the Lord”* (1 Cor 2:16). Any manner of thinking that deviates from that *“mind”* is of the flesh, and is to be rejected. In order to be *“of one mind,”* it is imperative that we concentrate on the same thing—the same central, or pivotal, realities. It is a common vision that produces a single mind. This

is not a call to be stereotyped and lifeless. There is room for liberty in our thoughts and perceptions. Yet, when we insist on championing this right, we give the advantage to the flesh. **Valid perceptions do not conflict with each another.**

Having the same mind involves having the same frame of reference—the same foundation for thought. It is looking the same way, concentrating on the same thing, and having the same priorities. It is a “*this one thing I do*” mentality (Phil 3:13), where everything we think and do is brought into harmony with our quest to know Christ. Having “*the same mind*” is thinking upon things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (Phil 4:8). It is determining to know nothing save “*Christ and Him crucified*” (1 Cor 2:2). There may be varying degrees of perception, but they will all be harmonious and will not disrupt the unity of the Spirit. I have rarely heard single-mindedness emphasized among professed believers. It is generally considered idealistic, and not within the realm of possibility. But in our text, it is an essentiality.

“Having compassion for one another.” Having compassion is being sympathetic, able to share the same feelings with someone who is burdened or suffering. This cannot be done mechanically, or by rote. It is a Divine trait, as evidenced in the Lord’s reaction to His needy people. “*In all their affliction He was afflicted*” (Isa 63:9). The Spirit says it this way in Hebrews 13:3. “*Remember the prisoners as if chained with them; those who are mistreated; since you yourselves are in the body also.*”^{NKJV} This speaks of a consideration of one another that can only be attained by faith and in the Spirit. Again it is written, “*And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it*” (1 Cor 12:26), and “*Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ*” (Gal 6:2).

Compassion is necessary for effective ministry. Just as Jesus being “*touched with the feeling of our infirmities*” makes Him an proficient minister to us (Heb 4:15), so having compassion on one another enables us to be helpful to our brethren. Many a suffering saint has been sustained by the compassion of kindred spirits. Although such a ministry is not common in our day, we can play a significant role in the body of Christ by soliciting grace to make us productive in this area. The people of God need this compassion.

LOVE, TENDERHEATEDNESS, AND COURTESY

“^{8B} . . . *love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.*”^{NKJV} Care must be taken not to place this exhortation in an institutional setting, as though it was speaking only of the brethren with whom we meet. Loving as brethren is not loving as fleshly brothers love. That type of love does not flow deep enough for the saints. This is loving as those who are brothers of Jesus, holding a high regard for all who are joined to Him. Such love is to be “*fervent,*” or intently and with zeal (1 Pet 1:22), and “*without dissimulation,*” or hypocrisy (Rom 12:9). Our love for one another is not heartless or formalistic. Loving as brethren involves praying for one another (James 5:16), teaching and admonishing one another (Rom 15:14), and building up, or edifying, one another in the faith (1 Thess 5:11). It includes considering one another (Heb 10:24), forgiving one another (Eph 4:32), and pleasing one another for good to edification (Rom 15:2). To love as brethren is to prefer one another “*in honor*” (Rom 12:10).

Loving as brethren is particularly important because of our status in this world. We are strangers and pilgrims here, not received by the world, and constantly hounded by the wicked one. The love of God’s people sweetens the cup of life, and makes our burdens bearable. It also brings honor to God, for He teaches us to love one another (1 Thess 4:9).

“Be tenderhearted.” Life has a way of making us calloused and insensitive. We must not allow this to happen. Calloused spirits are insensitive ones, unable to receive from God or minister in His name. One of the great exhortations of Scripture in this regard is found in Ephesians 4:32. “*And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath*

forgiven you.” The KJV accents the practical part of this word: **“pitiful.”** It involves a compassion that compels the person to pour mollifying ointment into the spiritual wounds and bruises of the brethren. Israel was severely upbraided by God because the wounds, bruises, and sores of her people *“have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified (soothed) with ointment”* (Isa 1:6).

Some of God’s people live continually with great duress and sorrow. Their only repast or place of rest is among the saints of God. The saints are to be sensitive of these situations, not allowing the hardness of earthly concerns to make them insensitive. When Jesus saw a widow from Nain in the funeral procession of her only son, *“He had compassion on her,”* and raised her son from the dead (Lk 7:11-13). He was *“tenderhearted,”* or *“pitiful.”* The people of God do well to culture such an environment as contributes to sensitive hearts. Things must be removed from their gatherings that contribute to hardness and insensitivity. You may have noticed that empty form, levity, and academic approaches to the things of God, all work against compassion.

“Be courteous.” Only one other in Scripture mentions this word. When shipwrecked on the island Melita, the chief man of the island, Publius, received them and lodged them *“courteously”* (Acts 28:7). The word means to be friendly or kindly minded. It involves being gentle, cordial, and eager to be agreeable. It is the opposite of contention and self-centeredness. Being courteous is an aspect of humility, when one refuses to make self and self-interests the focus of attention. Such a person is not overbearing, but is acutely mindful of the needs of others. This grace also involves being friendly-minded, or cultivating a friendly disposition. Most of us could do with some improvement in this area.

These exhortations are a summons to work on the environment of the brethren--a sort of spiritual ecological concern. Where these virtues are found, an atmosphere is created where the Spirit of the Lord can work, and edification and strengthening can occur. This is involved in keeping *“the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Eph 4:3). Remember, *“the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace”* (James 3:16). A lack of consideration for one another stifles spiritual life. Where hearts are not in harmony with the heart of our Lord, the life of God is suffocated. If you have been exposed to a religious atmosphere where these things are lacking, you know the truth of these words. Each of us has a choice set before us to be profitable to God’s people.

BEING A BLESSING AND INHERITING A BLESSING

“^{3:9} . . . not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.”^{NKJV} A retaliatory spirit is an ungodly spirit. When evil is done to us, we are not to *“return”* evil, retaliating as though there was no God to set things straight. The solemn word is given to us, *“See that none render evil for evil unto any man”* (1 Thess 5:15). Jesus outlined the proper response to these things. *“Do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you”* (Lk 6:27-28). Elsewhere the Spirit exhorts, *“Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not”* (Rom 12:14). *“Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom 12:20-21). *“Recompense to no man evil for evil”* (Rom 12:17). Our real foes are not flesh and blood, and we must not conduct our lives as though they were (Eph 6:12). Furthermore, obeying these exhortations will **not** put us at a disadvantage. Rather, it will bring the Lord by our side, to fight for us. In believing this, we will experience the peace of God.

“Blessing.” What is the alternative to returning evil for evil and reviling, or abusive speech, for reviling? It is *“giving a blessing instead.”*^{NASB} Here is an area where much improvement can be realized. Many professed believers have never thought of *“blessing”* anyone, let alone those doing

evil to them and reviling them. Did not Jesus do this very thing when He healed Malchus' ear in the garden (Lk 22:51). When He was on the cross, reviled and oppressed by the people, did He not cry out, "*Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do*" (Lk 23:34). When He knew the multitudes would leave Him because of His words, He fed them because they were hungry, and would have fainted in the way had He not done so (Matt 15:32).

One of the promises made to Abraham was, "*thou shalt **be** a blessing*" (Gen 12:2). That is, not only would blessing come TO Abraham, it would flow out FROM him as well. The same promise was made years later to the Jews. "*O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall **be** a blessing*" (Zech 8:13). To "*bless*" someone is to bring benefit to them, to give them some advantage. Jesus brings this point home to our hearts. "*But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; **that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven***" (Matt 5:44-45). Where men do not conduct themselves in harmony with the life of God, they can make no claim to identity with Him.

Called to inherit a blessing. Why did God draw us to Himself? It was "*that ye should inherit a blessing.*" The fact that it is "*inherited*" signifies that it is not from this world, nor is it attained through fleshly identity. To "*inherit*" means to **OBTAIN**, and to do so from God and in a righteous manner.

Faith removes you from this world, proving your inheritance is not here. The word "*blessing*" includes the idea of abundance. Thus the Lord speaks of blessing "*abundantly*" (Psa 132:15). There is a magnitude to the blessing of salvation that is scarcely known among believers. God has not called us to meagerness, but to plentitude and fulness. Believers can afford to give and to bless because they have been called to so much.

This abundance is not of the earth, else we would not be called to "*inherit*" it. Gross sinners can obtain much of this world's wealth. For this reason alone, we must not regard the world as the object of our attention, or the source the blessing to which we have been called. In Christ we "*have obtained an inheritance*" (Eph 1:11). While we are in this world, we do not obtain it in its fulness. However, we do receive the Spirit, "*the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession*" (Eph 1:14)—and the Spirit is "*poured out on us abundantly*" (Tit 3:5-6). That gift is a pledge of what is coming.

If the people of God will focus their attention on their inheritance, and lay up for themselves treasures in heaven, it will reduce the magnitude of their trials. It will also enable them to bless those who despitefully use them, thereby showing the superiority of life in Christ to death in trespasses and sins.

LESSON #27

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:10} For "He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. ¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. ¹² For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.” (1 Pet 3:10-12, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

The unbeliever does not see the life of faith as practical, being able to be translated into everyday life. Those in the flesh, therefore, see the *Christian life* as one of philosophy—a mere idea, with no real substance to it. Such people also see living to the Lord as a basically miserable existence, with no real satisfaction or joy. This notion has even penetrated the professed church, causing people to reject any solid commitment to Christ. But these are completely wrong notions, as our text will prove. There is great satisfaction to be found in living by faith. When the things of God are sought with zeal and consistency, we become the richer and more gratified because of it. Often, this aspect of life in Christ is not mentioned, leading some to conclude faith only suppresses people, never liberating and pleasing them. The Spirit uses Peter to dispel any such imagination. We are at our best when we are living in the light. Our hearts are most full then, and we are most pleased. We have not been called to inherit misery, but a blessing. The Lord is good to His children, and they are urged to live within the perimeter of His good and acceptable will.

LOVING LIFE AND SEEING GOOD DAYS

“^{3:10} For He who would love life and see good days . . . ” NKJV This whole passage is a quotation of Psalm 34:12-15. The Spirit refers to it to support the last statement of verse nine: “*knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*” In general, this passage is urging us to live our lives to obtain the blessing, not as those who are under a form of strict moral bondage or discipline. Faith will lead a person to expect the best, not the worst. It will stimulate hope, and enable the person to look for a blessing in life itself.

The phrasing of this expression may sound strange: “**would love life.**” The NASB reads, “*means (would) to love life.*” The word for “love” is **avgapa/n** (aga-pan), which is a love of will and action—a love that does something. Ordinarily, such love is applied to our attitude toward God, our brethren, and God’s Word. But here it is applied to life itself. Life is to be addressed as an area where the blessing of God can be obtained—where lasting and joyful benefits can be realized. Life may not be a “bowl of cherries,” but it is a rich repository of blessing for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Earlier, Peter referred to our lives in the world as “*the time of your sojourning,*” saying we should spend them in *godly* fear (1:17). Also, he reminded us that we are “*strangers and pilgrims*” here (2:11). This might lead some to believe there are no real benefits for us now, that only misery and sorrow attend our lives in this world. But this is not at all the case. Life can be “*loved,*” i.e., addressed with the expectancy of finding joy and benefit in it.

This may appear to contradict the words of Jesus. “*He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal*” (John 12:25). And again, “*He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it*” (Matt 10:39; 16:25). Notice the emphasis of our Lord’s words: “**HIS life.**” This is life lived selfishly, as though it were our own. It is life lived in strict self-interest, with only the satisfaction of the lusts of the flesh and eye being paramount. But the life of which Peter speaks is life itself—a gift from God. It is life viewed as a stewardship, and in which the direction and blessing of God can be experienced. The

true believer forfeits self interests in favor of living *“unto the Lord”* (Rom 14:8). He knows that Christ died that we might no longer live unto ourselves, *“but unto Him which died for them, and rose again”* (2 Cor 5:15).

The point made in our text is that such a life is filled with satisfaction and profit, because we have been called to *“inherit a blessing.”* Thus we *“love life,”* eager to see what good thing the Lord will bring to us, and how we may be used in His Kingdom. Faith provokes us to know we **will** *“see good days.”* The believer knows that even when he endures hardship for Jesus’ sake, life will *“turn out for”* his *“deliverance through”* the *“prayer”* of saints *“and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ”* (Phil 1:19).

“Good days” are ones when our eyes and ears see and hear good things from God (Matt 13:16). They are days when we experience the peace of God, that keeps our hearts and minds (Phil 4:7), and we are *“filled with all joy and peace in believing”* (Rom 15:13). It is a day when a lively sense of this truth is upon the heart and mind: *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose”* (Rom 8:28).

Joseph had a *“good day”* when he realized the real intent of being sold into slavery by his brothers. He said to them, *“But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive”* (Gen 50:20). There are times when we are able to see the hand of God upon us for blessing. Such times are *“good days.”* We are to believe Go will bring more of them to us.

Although we are not guaranteed freedom from the oppression of men, and are even told *“in the world, ye shall have tribulation,”* yet there is more. We live in the persuasion that *“When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him”* (Prov 16:7). He can make Esau be peaceful toward Jacob (Gen 33:9). He can cause our enemies to treat us well (Jer 15:11). He can give His people rest from the oppressors, see to it that they are edified, and enable them to walk in the comfort of the Spirit and be multiplied (Acts 9:31). God’s people can *“see good days,”* and should will to do so.

REFRAINING, TURNING, SEEKING and PURSUING

“^{10B-11} . . . Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. ¹¹ Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it.” ^{NKJV} If our lives are to be profitable, and our days good, some things must be subdued and avoided. The words before us are not general tips for successful living, to be shared with all people. There is no way for the unbelieving to have profitable life and good days. They are living in a state of condemnation, and the wrath of God is upon them (John 3:18,36). These words are for the godly, and speak of maintaining our spiritual balance in a declining world.

One of the primary areas of concern is the eruption of the old nature through our mouths. The tongue must be *“bridled,”* else it voids out religion (James 1:26). Although a *“little member,”* it can kindle a blazing fire of iniquity. It is *“is a fire, a world of iniquity,”* and *“it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.”* It is true, *“no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison”* (James 3:5-8). However, the tongue can be subdued and subordinated by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit. The power of life is in it as well as that of death (Prov 18:21).

Speaking *“evil”* is more than speaking derogatorily. It is speaking without God in mind, and with *“this present evil world”* dominating both thought and speech. Speaking *“deceit”* is speaking with *“guile,”* misrepresenting our persons and motives. Restraining the tongue from speaking evil, and the lips from speaking deceit, sanctifies the tongue and lips, committing them to *“speak truth”* (Prov 8:7; Eph 4:25). Many a believer has made his own life miserable by allowing the tongue and

lips to speak perverse and uncomely things. The aggressiveness with which wickedness strives to express itself is startling. Every believer experiences this principle: *“when I would do good, evil is present with me.”*

Evil is to be *“eschewed”*^{KJV}, or zealously avoided. Even the *“appearance of evil”* is to be vigorously shunned (1 Thess 5:22). The word *“eschew”* involves going out of our way to avoid evil. We are not to imagine we are strong enough to stand in the midst of evil when we are able to avoid it. The reason for turning away from evil, is that *“good”* cannot be done if we do not do so. Evil so drains the soul that it becomes incapable of doing good. Doing good puts us into a realm where the blessing of the Lord can be experienced. As it is written, *“Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed”* (Psa 37:3).

Our goodness is to extend to *“all men,”* but *“especially those of the household of faith”* (Gal 6:10). Jesus said, *“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again”* (Lk 6:35). From another perspective, doing good is allowing the *“rivers of living waters”* to flow out of our innermost persons (John 7:38). However, this cannot happen if we do not turn away from evil. Further, it is only in this way that we will be able to love life and see good days.

Peace is something that must be earnestly sought and fervently pursued: *“Let him seek peace and pursue it.”* The KJV uses the word *“ensue,”* when means follow energetically after it, and press toward it. It assumes there are obstacles along the way, seeking to hinder us from being *“peaceable.”* This peace has to do with our relationship to others. Every effort is to be expended to accomplish this. As it is written, *“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men”* (Rom 12:18). Believers particularly are to *“be at peace”* among themselves (1 Thess 5:13). We are also exhorted, *“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord”* (Heb 12:14).

The lack of peace disrupts life, making it difficult to bear. The presence of it enables the graces of the Spirit to grow more readily in our lives (James 3:18). Loving, or enjoying and gaining the most from, life has a great deal to do with how we conduct our lives. Much misery is the direct result of untempered speech and failing to turn away from evil. What person is able to calculate the effects wickedness has had upon their lives? Indeed, we have been called into a fierce warfare, and blessed is the person who sees it.

THE LORD IS WATCHING

“^{3:12} For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”^{NKJV} Why give attention to such details as not speaking evil or deceit, avoiding evil, doing good, and pursuing peace? It is because we are under the watchful eyes of our Lord. We do not refrain from evil to be seen of men, but because of our God. The idea here is not that of a threat, although that will be expressed at the conclusion of this verse. Rather, it is that we have been called *“to inherit a blessing,”* and the Lord is looking intently to bestow it upon us. He cannot do it, however, while we are under the domination of the *“old man,”* which He crucified for us when we were baptized into Christ (Rom 6:6). Those imagining God will bless any person involved in sin are simply deluded.

Under the Old Covenant, the eyes of the Lord were said to be upon the land of promise. *“A land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year”* (Deut 11:12). In Christ, however, God has inherited a people, not a land, and His eye is ever upon them. He is looking to do them good, and waiting to be gracious to them (Deut 30:5; Isa 30:18). The *“eyes of the Lord”* are ever scanning the earth, *“that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His”*^{NASB} (2 Chron 16:9). This blessing is what causes us to *“love life and see good days.”* Our conduct is but a means bringing us

into that blessing. However the blessing itself comes from the Lord like “*times of refreshing*” (Acts 3:19).

The ears of the Lord are “*open*” to the “*prayers*” of His people. By that, the Spirit means He is attentive to their prayers, and has a keen interest in them. You may remember the marvelous promise of 2 Chronicles 7:14. “*If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*” The very next verse reads, “*Now mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place*” (v. 15). The promise parallels the one in our text. Refraining our lips from speaking evil, our mouths from guile, and turning away from evil, are like remaining in the temple—staying in the holy place. It is refusing to be moved away from the place blessed by God in Christ Jesus. The “*effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man*” still “*availeth much*” (James 5:16). Praying is more than human expression. It involves Divine attention as well. As you can see, husbands are not the only ones whose prayers are directly impacted by their conduct (1 Pet 3:7).

Here is one of the great disjunctives of Scripture. “*BUT the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.*” It makes little difference whether or not the one doing evil is a professing believer. The Lord has pledged this, and there is no way it can be retracted. “*But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile*” (Rom 2:8-9). Is that not reason enough to avoid evil at any cost? God cannot look at iniquity without becoming angry – even when the iniquities of us all were laid upon His only begotten Son. What would lead any professing believer to think he could indulge in sin and still experience God’s favor. Why would such a person imagine their prayers were heard by the Living God?

Thus the Spirit has sensitized our souls to the nature of our relationship to God through Christ Jesus. It is one that requires the avoidance of evil and a commitment to righteousness. When, by the grace of God, this is accomplished, the most inconvenient and difficult of lives become joyful, and filled with blessings from God. Life not only becomes tolerable, but is characterized by “*good days.*” It is possible for life to be loved, and for it NOT to be a burden. The secret is in getting under the yoke with Jesus, subduing the flesh, and pursuing peace and righteousness. This can only be done by faith.

All of this requires intense effort on our part, because we are in a hostile arena, not a moral vacuum. However, when we will extend ourselves by faith, the grace of God will lift, empower, and sustain us. We will truly “*love life and see good days.*”

LESSON #28

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:13} And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? ¹⁴ But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled” (1 Pet 3:13-14, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

In Christ, life is viewed from a higher vantage point. From the standpoint of opportunity, it is a privilege. Considered from the view of responsibility, it is a stewardship. Within the framework of stewardship, life is the fulfillment of a purpose—a Divinely appointed purpose. When we are called of God, we are brought into His objective, and given a role to play in its fulfillment. Although some roles are prominent, like those of Moses, Joshua, David, the Prophets, John the Baptist, and the Apostles, all are necessary and significant. Particularly in Christ Jesus, *“God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him”* (1 Cor 12:18). As we live by faith, we are enabled to fulfill our role, and there is nothing the powers of darkness can do about it. That is the particular vantage point of our text. Our enemies are viewed as impotent to thwart the work of God within us. In the end, faith will triumph, and therefore we are not to be troubled when we encounter opposition, as fierce as it may be. This is a lofty view of life, and can only be entertained by faith. Once seen, it changes the entire perspective of life.

WHO IS HE THAT WILL HARM YOU?

“^{3:13A} And who is he that will harm you. . .”^{KJV} There are two vital views of this text. **First, godliness is, by its very nature, peaceable.** The qualities of the wisdom that comes from above—wisdom to live by—accentuate this fact. *“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, 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”* (James 3:17-18). When the saints are governed by such wisdom, their enemies will be least likely to oppress them. It is as though God Himself intervenes for them, providing a time for sowing the fruit of righteousness among those who are otherwise hostile to the Gospel. Thus we read of the early church, *“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved”* (Acts 2:46-47). Later, when the Jewish leaders sought to squelch the spread of the Gospel, they yielded to more peaceable impulses *“because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done”* (Acts 4:21). This was also an area in which Jesus increased as He grew. *“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God **and man**”* (Lk 2:52). Later, when He was at the peak of His earthly ministry, the scribes and chief priests of the people sought to destroy Jesus, but could not do it *“for all the people were very attentive to hear Him”* (Lk 19:48). This is certainly not the only view of the matter, but it is one aspect of it. God’s people are not antagonistic by nature. Possessed of the wisdom that is from above, they are peaceable, seeking to be at peace with all men as much as possible. They are *“gentle,”* even as their Master, not seeking to cause foolish disruption. Living waters flow out from their inmost being, bringing life and refreshment to all who will receive it.

There is another perspective of this text which is also true. *“Harm,”* in this case, means **ultimate** harm, or thrusting us out of our role in the Kingdom of God. Simply put, it is not possible for our enemies to end the work in us that God Himself has begun. An example of this is found in our Lord’s words to His disciples. He warned them, *“they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings*

and rulers for my name's sake . . . And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." Fierce opposition would be experienced by them. He told them, however, that the opposition would *"turn out for you as an occasion for testimony."* He would give them a *"mouth of wisdom"* which all of their enemies would not be able to *"gainsay or resist."* Their ministry would not be thwarted by their enemies! Following the revealing of the vicious antagonism they would experience, Jesus said, *"But there shall not an hair of your head perish"* (Lk 21:12-18). Divine protection belonged to them, as also declared in Luke 12:7. *"But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."* Viewed in the flesh, James was killed with the sword by Herod (Acts 12:2), and Peter and John were severely beaten (Acts 5:40). Why did Jesus say *"an hair"* of their head would not perish?

This is a way of saying their appointed work would not come to an end prematurely. This manner of speaking was also used in Old Testament times. In a threatening situation it was said of Jonathan, *"there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground"* (1 Sam 14:45). The people of God are not left to happenstance or the will of their enemies. While persecution and aggressive opposition may be experienced, it will have no lasting effect upon the work they have been called to do.

When the believer has a firm grip on this reality, a certain boldness accompanies Kingdom labors that is indispensable. *"So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me"* (Heb 13:6). Thus, as we labor in the vineyard of the Lord, we do not devote ourselves to thinking how our labors will be perceived by our enemies, but how they will bring honor to our Lord. God will give us the strength to complete our work! Think once again, *"who is he that will harm you?"*

FOLLOWING THAT WHICH IS GOOD

"^{13b} . . . if you become followers of what is good?" ^{NKJV} The question is not simply, "who is he that will harm you," but *"who is he that will harm you if you become followers of what is good?"* There is a certain kingdom mentality that is required here. First, true *"good"* tends to soften the words and aggression of our enemies, and we must reckon on this. Thus it is written, *"A soft answer turneth away wrath"* (Prov 15:1). Again, *"By long forbearing is a prince persuaded, and a soft tongue breaketh the bone"* (Prov 25:15). This is not simply a principle of living, but one in which Divine activity can be found. As it is written, *"When a man's ways please the LORD, **He** maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him"* (Prov 16:7). Following what is *"good"* puts the Lord on our side.

What does it mean to follow what is good? Following, in this case, is not as term of distance, but one of nearness. There is such a thing as following from a distance, or from afar (Matt 26:58). A Kingdom follower is an imitator, or one who becomes like what is being followed. The Scriptures speak about following the godly: *"be ye followers of me"* (1 Cor 4:16). *"Be ye followers of me as I also am of Christ"* (1 Cor 11:1). We are also admonished to be *"followers of God"* (Eph 5:21), and *"of the churches of God"* (1 Thess 2:14). We are also to consider the saints who went before us, following them *"who through faith and patience inherit the promises"* (Heb 6:12). Therefore, to *"follow good"* is to see what is *"good"* in the eyes of God, and seek for it to be found IN us.

To *"follow good"* means to *"DO good."* Jesus admonished us to *"do good"* (Lk 6:35). Believers are admonished to *"do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"* (Gal 6:10). Those who are blessed with abundant resources are exhorted to *"do good,"* becoming *"rich in good works"* (1 Tim 6:18). Solemnly, we are warned not to forget to *"do good"* (Heb 13:16). Things that are *"good"* will hold up in the day of judgment. These are works that will stand the test of fire, and transport into the world to come. They are not deeds that are self-centered.

Rather, they are characterized by a love, first for God, then for our fellow man. This is in strict keeping with the two greatest commandments of the Law (Matt 22:37-40).

Doing good is not devoting ourselves to a special project, although there is certainly nothing wrong with that. Much of the contemporary church, I fear, thinks of doing good only periodically, and when special needs arise. Following good, however, goes far beyond that. It involves a heart that desires to “**abound unto EVERY good work**” (2 Cor 9:8). It enters into labor with the expectation of being “**fruitful in EVERY good work**” (Col 1:10). One of the qualifications for widows receiving support from the church is this: “*if she has **diligently followed EVERY good work***” (1 Tim 5:10). Someone sure to be used by God is one “**prepared for EVERY good work**” (2 Tim 2:21). Believers are admonished to be “**ready for EVERY good work**” (Tit 3:1). There is also the matter of being “*complete,*” for fully equipped for “**EVERY good work**” (Heb 13:21).

All of this is involved in being “*followers of that which is good.*” It is a different motive for living—one that puts self on the periphery of life instead of at its center. The world calls men to become absorbed with themselves, seek their own interests, and ignore the call of the Almighty. That type of living tends to agitate life, making it more difficult to live. Those who can recall their former manner of life will acknowledge this is the case. As it is written, “*What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death*” (Rom 6:21).

Following what is good moves you more fully into the realm of blessing. It neutralizes the wrath of your enemies, which would be far worse if it were not for your pursuit of the good. It also draws you deeper into the will of the Lord and your ministry in His Kingdom. No person will be fruitful for the Lord who is not following after good. The Lord has not called us to a religious profession, but to participation in His good and acceptable and perfect will (Rom 12:1-2). He will enable you to fulfill your ministry as you follow what is good, and your enemies will not be able to cut that ministry short.

SUFFERING FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE

“^{3:12} ***But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.***”^{NKJV} Our text will not produce naive disciples who imagine they will never encounter trouble or difficulty. Some display their ignorance by insisting that faithfulness to God frees men from opposition and danger. Thus, when they read “*And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath*” (Deut 28:13), they suppose they are in charge of every situation. However, this is not a fair representation of the case. If their assessment were true, this verse would have to be cut from our Bibles.

Even though He has said no one can ultimately harm us if we follow what is good, yet the Spirit says there will be times when we “*suffer for righteousness' sake.*” Earlier, the Spirit spoke of “*suffering wrongfully,*” and suffering for doing well (2:19,20). In the fourth chapter, we will read of being “*reproached for the name of Christ*” (1 Pet 4:14). The flesh views this as being contradictory—i.e., no one harming us, yet we suffer!

There are different kinds of suffering intended by this text. There is suffering certain losses because of following truth and goodness. Many believers have endured the plundering or confiscation of their possessions because of their faith (Heb 10:34). Some have been beaten miserably for their testimony (Acts 16:23). Others have had their names reproached, suffering dishonor among men (2 Cor 6:8). Still others have simply had their message ignored and rejected (Jer 18:18). All of these, and more, are suffering “*for righteousness' sake,*” or because you are righteous.

Some have ceased to be aggressive for the Lord in order to avoid these sufferings. The Spirit

affirms this type of action constitutes a denial of Christ. *“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us”* (Rom 8:17). To close our mouths and cease to pursue what is good and righteous in order to avoid the repercussions of that commitment, and the wrath of our enemies, is disastrous.

The point of our text is that believers are more apt to lead a quiet and peaceable life by devoting themselves to following good, than by agitation, insurrection, and demonstration. This conflicts sharply with a social or political view of life, which encourages taking matters into our own hands.

YOU ARE BLESSED. Note how the Spirit raises us into the heavenly places. Even though we *“suffer for righteousness’ sake,”* we **“ARE BLESSED.”** There is a *“fellowship”* with Jesus in this suffering that can only be grasped by faith. **The suffering is in the flesh, the blessedness is in the spirit.** In such suffering, we are being counted worthy of the Kingdom for which we suffer (2 Thess 1:5)—that is a blessing. Because of the suffering, we receive consolation from the Lord Himself. *“For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ”* (2 Cor 1:5)—that is a blessing. Blessing comes from God, and proves to be greater than any circumstance in the flesh—even suffering. It is to your advantage to suffer with Jesus, for then you will reign with Him.

Knowing that believers will confront the animosity and threats of men, the Spirit comforts our hearts. **“AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED.”**^{NASB} The same words were spoken to Israel concerning their enemies (Isa 8:12). Whether it is a giant Goliath, a rampaging Sennacherib, or an intimidating Herod, the work of God cannot be stopped by such enemies! They cannot stop God from blessing you, but can only prove to be an occasion for further blessing. You must believe that! Like the threats of Goliath, the words of our enemies are intimidating to the flesh. Such fears, however, will move us out of the work of the Lord, for *“fear has torment”* (1 John 4:18).

Although times will come when we are *“troubled on every side”* (2 Cor 4:8; 7:5), we must not allow our hearts to be troubled. Our times, as well as our ministries, are in the hands of the Lord. The righteous, unintimidated by the threats of their enemies, are *“bold as a lion”* (Prov 28:1). When professed believers are fearful of their enemies, that very fear moves faith out of their hearts. That is why Jesus associated fear with *“no faith”* (Mk 4:40). Let us boldly pursue doing good and fulfilling our ministries without the fear of man.

LESSON #29

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:15} But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; ¹⁶ having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” (1 Pet 3:15-17, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

When men make religion convenient, they do a great disservice to the sons of men. In so doing, they disarm the soul, giving a greater accent to life in this world than to spiritual life, which is in conflict with this world. Convenience, in this respect, is nothing more than dulling the edge of the Gospel—hiding from men that there is a sharp conflict between life in Christ and the spirit of the present age. Our text is built upon the premise that an unavoidable clash exists between those who are regenerated and those who are not. That conflict has been caused by the introduction of the very life of Christ, with whom believers have been crucified, buried, and risen. It is so sharp, that those who are not in Christ refuse to acknowledge harmlessness and benefit in the saints, even causing them to suffer for righteousness sake. The Holy Spirit is showing us how to conduct ourselves in this temporary situation, assuring us the eye of the Lord is upon us, and will protect us.

SANCTIFY THE LORD IN YOUR HEART

“^{3:15A} But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . .”^{NKJV} The Spirit is in the midst of instructing us concerning suffering for righteousness' sake. He does so because of the inevitability of suffering. It is never a question of whether or not the saints will incur opposition for their faith. It only a question of the nature and degree of that opposition. Now we are urged to develop, or culture, our relationship to God in the midst of our suffering. While we are enduring opposition, often very grievous to both heart and body, careful heed is to be given to our connection with the Lord. We are not to allow our eyes to be turned to our suffering. Rather, it is to be viewed as a confirmation that God is in us *“of a truth”* (1 Cor 14:25). It is also to become the occasion for spiritual advancement.

Sanctify the Lord. Normally, the saints themselves are said to be sanctified by God (1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; 2 Tim 2:21; Heb 2:11; Jude 1). But here, God is said to be *“sanctified”* by the saints. The word *“sanctify”* means to hallow, or make holy. It involves acknowledging that God is holy and separate from any defiling associations. In our text, it means to **acknowledge** God as Lord in every aspect of our lives—to cease to live any part of life without recognizing He is Lord over it. Other versions accentuate this. *“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.”*^{NIV} *“But in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord.”*^{RSV} *“But give honor to Christ in your hearts as your Lord.”*^{BBE} The idea is that Christ is really Lord, but must be acknowledged by us as such if we are to benefit from it. The difference in the translations, with some referring to Christ, should not be confusing to us. Our only access to God is through Christ. It is therefore understood that any association with God is by Him.

The matter of perceiving Christ as Lord and living in view of that reality is central in Scripture. Jesus is God's *“Christ,”* but He is OUR *“Lord.”* Thomas confessed Him to be *“My Lord and my God”* (John 20:28). That is the type of recognition to which our text refers. Repeatedly Jesus is referred to as *“our Lord”* (Rom 1:3; 4:24; 5:1; 6:11; 1 Pet 1:3). The truth of the matter is that He cannot be received in any other capacity. Perhaps you have heard people refer to Jesus being received as a Savior, but not as Lord. This is a human notion, and has no support in God's Word. The idea of being reconciled to God and living in His favor without acknowledging Jesus as Lord is a most dangerous one. We do not belong to ourselves, but have been bought with a price (1 Cor

6:19). To live as though that were not the case is a sin of tremendous magnitude. Because in suffering saints will be tempted to abandon this truth, they are not urged to set Jesus apart in their hearts as Lord, not allowing the opposition of men to move them from allegiance to Him.

In your hearts. While we serve the Law of the Lord with our minds (Rom 7:25), we sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts. This is not a mere acknowledgment that Christ is “*Lord of all*” (Acts 10:36), but a heartfelt commitment to His rule. A deep and personal commitment to the Lord is imperative to being accepted by God. This is a refusal to give ourselves to anyone else, or serve any other purpose. It is giving Jesus the throne of our heart, being made “*willing in the day of His power*” (Psa 110:3). Sanctifying the Lord God in our heart results in a refusal to yield to any opposing influence. Because the heart is superior to the mind, all of life, including our thoughts, is brought into accord with the will of God when He is sanctified in our hearts.

This is another way of saying we live and die “*unto the Lord*” (Rom 14:8). Whether it is our words or our deeds, we “*do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him*” (Col 3:17). In so doing, we expand our fellowship with Christ, into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9). Both the Father and the Son will thus dwell more fully within us, making Themselves known to us (John 14:21,23). It is the Lord’s manner to remain only where He is wanted. This was revealed in His reaction to Cleopas and his companion who desired His presence (Lk 24:29). It was also seen in His reaction to the people of Gadara, who did NOT want His presence (Matt 8:34-9:1). Sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts is making Him welcome, imploring Him to abide with us, teach us, and lead us. It is an attitude of the heart more than words from the mouth. It reflects a deep desire to live in the light of His presence and blessing, always being keenly aware of Him.

ALWAYS BE READY TO GIVE AN ANSWER

“^{15b} . . . *and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.*”^{NKJV} The KJV reads, “*give an answer,*” which means to frame a defense, or provide an explanation. Notice, this readiness is obtained by sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts. The Spirit does not say to prepare an answer, but to be **ready** to give one. The idea is that fellowship with Christ, or sanctifying the Lord in our hearts, will yield the ability to persuasively present a defense for the faith embraced. On one occasion, Paul gave such a strong defense Agrippa was “*almost persuaded*” to become a Christian (Acts 26:28). On another occasion when he “*reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,*” Felix “*trembled,*” asking that Paul go his way and come at a more convenient time (Acts 24:25). When Stephen stood before the Jewish council, he gave a most eloquent defense of the faith (Acts 7:2-53). In each of these cases, the men were asked for an explanation of their faith.

Here is a form of spreading the Gospel that is rarely emphasized in a day, when religious institutionalism reigns. It presumes there is such a contrast between the lives of believers and unbelievers that it provokes inquiry. We are living in a time, however, when that kind of contrast has nearly been obliterated in Western culture. Little difference is perceived between believers and unbelievers, and thus little inquiry is being made.

To “*give a defense,*” or “*give an answer,*” does not mean to present proofs that the Bible is true, or that Jesus really lived and died. Nor does it intimate that believers are to be resolved to answer every question posed by their opponents. There may very well be people with unusual wisdom and insight who can “*refute those who contradict*” the truth of the Gospel, thereby stopping their mouths (Tit 1:11). There is a place for such noble warriors. However, that is not the point of this admonition. Here is an exhortation for all believers, everywhere, and for all time. They are all to be ready to give an answer.

The answer to be given regards a *“reason for the hope”* that is resident in the believer. What causes them to live so differently? It is obvious they do not cling to this world. What do they expect, and why do they expect it? Why are they diligent about purifying themselves, even as Christ is pure (1 John 3:3)? Why does it not bother them that they do not fit into the passing fashions of this world? Why do the things of God dominate their minds, and His Word hold such a prominent position in their thoughts? This, and more, is involved in giving an answer, or defense, for the hope that is *“in”* us.

This is not a call to defend theological positions, however sound they may be. It is not a request to explain why our church believes a certain way, or why our families have traditionally embraced a certain line of religious thought. It involves answering WHY we believe rather than WHAT we believe. The exhortation assumes that WHAT we believe has resulted in a life that is in sharp conflict with that of the world.

The answer is to be given *“to every man that asks a reason for the hope”* that is obviously possessed. But notice how it is to be given: *“with meekness and fear.”* Meekness is a deliberate effort to avoid contention, yet still tell the truth. Here, *“meekness”* is the opposite of being prideful and arrogant. It acknowledges that we are what we are by the grace of God (1 Cor 15:10). Answering with *“meekness”* is answering with a mild disposition and a gentle spirit. Like God, the believer is desirous that *“all men be saved, and come to a knowledge of the truth”* (2 Tim 2:4).

The answer is also to be given *“with fear.”* This is not fear of the one asking for the reason, for the Spirit has already said, *“who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?”* This is a reverence for God that refuses to subject His holy name to shame and reproach. It is a fear that constrains a person to be more concerned about being rejected by God than harmed by his enemies (Matt 10:28). His great salvation is so revered, the believer will make no attempt to conceal it, or falsely present it. This fear allows no shame for being identified with the Lord or embracing His great salvation. *“Meekness and fear”* will bring great power to the *“answer”* of the believer, enabling God to work in it.

MAINTAINING A GOOD CONSCIENCE

“^{3:16} Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”^{NKJV} It is apparent in this text that God makes no allowance for hypocrisy or a lack of commitment to the Lord—none at all! The endless bantering that goes on between Christian sects has yielded more damage to the cause of Christ than any person dares to imagine. In all such cases, Christ has NOT been sanctified as Lord in the heart, men are NOT ready to give an answer for the hope that is in them, and meekness and fear are NOT present. Here an additional matter is brought to our attention: *“a good conscience.”*

Paul affirmed that his entire life was lived with this most cherished possession. *“I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day”* (Acts 23:1). Prior to being in Christ, his conscience was flawed because of his understanding, but he refused to violate it until he had more light. Paul wrote to Timothy that the objective of his teaching was threefold: *“love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”*^{NASB} (1 Tim 1:5). Where these are missing, the teaching has not yielded satisfactory results. I would further observe that this triad is not highly revered in the average “church.” We are further told that faith and a *“good conscience”* will keep us from making *“shipwreck of the faith”*—they protect us (1 Tim 1:19). In Hebrews 13:18, the writer refers to his own possession of *“a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.”*

A *“good conscience”* is one that does not condemn us—one that has the witness of the Spirit as a confirmation to its truth (Rom 9:1). It is a conscience that is *“pure,”* and can *“keep hold of the deep*

truths of faith^{NIV} (1 Tim 3:9). It is one that has been “*purged from dead works to serve the living God*” (Heb 9:14). The conscience is an inward sentinel, or watchman, that monitors our words and conduct, either condemning or commending them. It is essential that we have a “*good conscience*” that does not plague us because of what we have said and done. Without it, we will not be able to give an answer to those who ask a reason or the hope that is in us. If our heart or conscience condemns us, we will have no confidence before God or man. That will eventually lead to our fall.

When our “*answer,*” or “*defense*” is accompanied with the readiness produced by sanctifying the Lord in our hearts, and when it is characterized by meekness, fear, and a good conscience, it will tend to make our enemies ashamed. Working through our “*answer,*” the Lord can convince them they are wrong in charging us with being evildoers, and falsely accusing us. Even Pilate, as wicked as he was, had to admit three times he could “*find no fault*” in Jesus (John 18:38; 19:4,6). Lives that are lived unto the Lord are good lives, and are properly called “*good conversation*” or “*behavior.*”

When believers are faced with suffering, they must ever remember, “*it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*” Even then, our suffering is seen as an “*IF.*” Our enemies do not have control of us, able to do what they will whenever they want. If we suffer, it is according “*to the will of God.*” Many times, such suffering is in order that you “*may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer*” (2 Thess 1:5). Suffering unjustly is not by chance! When we do well, living by faith and in a good conscience, and affliction results from it, the working of God is being made known to us. He is showing us the conflict between this world and the one of which we are citizens. In such suffering, we are being better suited for the glory that awaits us. We are also being loosed from the hold of this world. There is also a richness of fellowship in suffering for doing good that cannot be realized any other way: “*the fellowship of His sufferings*” (Phil 3:10). That is what makes suffering for doing good “*better*” than suffering “*for doing evil.*”

The marvelous truth unveiled in this text will be best understood in contemplation and meditation. It is not something that can be learned like a mathematical table or a mechanical routine. The richness of its truth will be unfolded as you muse upon it. In your musing, the Lord will correlate what He has declared with what you have experienced.

LESSON #30

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:18} For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹ by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared . . . ” (1 Pet 3:18-20, NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

Occasionally, we confront texts that simply will not fit into any preconceived interpretations of Scripture. The text before us is such a one. Because of that, it is easy to miss the point being made by the Holy Spirit, devoting endless time to an attempt to resolve what is supposed to be an apparent contradiction of the truth. With care, we must avoid being detracted from the message directed to us. We are being confronted with the inevitability of suffering. Only the measure and duration of suffering differ for believers. Now, after establishing this with great power, we are called to look to Jesus. His suffering is the ultimate suffering, beginning with His betrayal and concluding with His death. In all of this, He remained perfectly “*just*,” or righteous. His sufferings were the result of our iniquities being placed upon Him. That is a truth that must never grow old to us. An understanding of it will hold us up when we do well, yet suffer for it. In the light of this, our own sufferings can be seen as a fellowship with Christ, and a prelude to our glorification. We need grace to ponder deeply Christ’s suffering for us.

CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED FOR SINS

“^{3:18a} For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God . . . ”^{NKJV} The flames of persecution had been directed toward the church, and many believers had been “*scattered*” throughout various regions (1:1). The Spirit had moved Peter to write comforting words, assuring them of their high calling (1:2-3). They had been begotten to an incorruptible inheritance, reserved in heaven for them, and they were being kept by the power of God—even in their persecution (1:4-5). Not only that, their suffering had a purpose: in it, their faith was being tested, even though they were experiencing great “*heaviness*,” or “*grief*.” The Divine objective was for their faith to honor Jesus when He returns, and suffering was helping meet that objective (1:6-7).

From the moral point of view, their sufferings were unjust. In fact, those who caused them to suffer for righteousness’ sake would be judged by God. However, it is not possible to survive suffering honorably while thinking only of the retribution that will be meted out by God upon our enemies. The Spirit summons us to ponder the greatest of all sufferings, namely those of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the consideration of His sufferings, we will find great solace, and strength to bear up under the assaults of men.

Remember, it is better to suffer for doing good than for doing evil (3:17). Jesus is the ultimate example of that. He “*suffered once for OUR sins*.” He Himself did good, yet suffered because WE did wrong. Much is made of this in Scripture, so it cannot be viewed as a mere point of doctrine. He “*bore our sins in His body on the tree*” (2:24). He “*bore our griefs*,” “*carried out sorrows*,” and “*was wounded for our transgressions*.” He was “*bruised for our iniquities*,” and “*the chastisement for our peace was upon Him*” (Isa 53:4-6). He died “*for the ungodly*” (Rom 5:6). God “*condemned*” our sin in the “*flesh*” of Christ (Rom 8:3). He “*died for our sins*” (1 Cor 15:3), which is never to be forgotten or minimized by saints.

The suffering of Jesus was precisely that: “*suffering*.” The fact that He was God “*manifest in*

the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16) did not minimize His sufferings. In fact, it actually accentuated them. That is why He recoiled at the thought of drinking the cup that was given to Him by the Father (Matt 26:39-44). So believers are not to imagine that having faith will relieve them of suffering. They are to look to Jesus, “*Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God*” (Heb 12:2). When they suffer because they are righteous, the consideration of Jesus will strengthen their hearts and enable them to endure to His glory.

Jesus suffered only “*once*” –or only during His tenure in this world. In this text, “*suffer*” includes the prelude to Christ’s death, and His death itself. The “*sufferings of Christ*” cover the whole range of His redemptive mission. Much is made of this in Scripture, particularly in the book of Hebrews (Heb 7:27; 9:12,26-28; 10:12,14). The reason for Jesus suffering only once was that the purpose of His suffering was realized. Unlike the sacrifices of old, His suffering and death accomplished God’s purpose.

The purpose is marvelously stated: “*that He might bring us to God.*” That is a Divine commentary on “*come unto God BY Him*” (Heb 7:25). We do not come to God alone, or unassisted, but are brought into His presence by our Savior. This is part of Him being with us, “*even unto the end of the world*” (Matt 28:20). This also confirms the priority of coming to God. Jesus did not suffer to make us well or wealthy. His sufferings are not the key to marital bliss and social tranquility. They are rather designed to get us into the presence of the Lord, where there is “*fulness of joy*” and “*pleasures for evermore*” (Psa 16:11). Jesus declared He was the appointed means of us coming “*to the Father*” (John 14:6). If that is not accomplished, no satisfactory progress has been made at all.

Great men of God were noted for being in the presence of God. Both Enoch and Noah “*walked with God*” (Gen 5:22; 6:9). Abraham was “*the friend of God*” (James 2:23). Jacob was with God “*face to face*” (Gen 32:30). Moses talked with God “*face to face*” (Ex 33:11). Isaiah saw the Lord “*high and lifted up*” (Isa 6:1-3). All of these experiences were brief, and soon ended. Christ suffered that He might “*bring us to God*” in a lasting and fruitful way. The ultimate good came from His ultimate suffering!

DEATH IN THE FLESH, LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

“^{18b} . . . ***being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit.***”^{NKJV} It is a most remarkable thing that “*the Prince of life*” was “*put to death*” (Acts 3:15). Elsewhere, it is written that Jesus was “*crucified through weakness*” (2 Cor 13:4), or in the weakest part of His constitution. This refers to the “*body*” God prepared for Him, and in which He bore our sins (Heb 10:5-10). He was “*put to death in the flesh*” in the sense of being “*cut off*” out of the land of the living, without seed or fleshly generation (Isa 53:8; Dan 9:26). “*The flesh*” refers to His human nature, in which He became identified with the ones He came to save (Heb 2:14). In His death, the union between His soul and body was severed for three days, for that is what death is. This is also confirmed by the words of Jesus, “*Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit*” (Lk 23:46). Jesus really died, laying down His life (John 10:17; 1 John 3:16). Because God was in the matter, His death is referred to as being “*delivered up for our offenses*” (Rom 4:25). The necessity of Christ’s death is powerfully declared in Colossians 1:21-22. “*And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled **in the body of His flesh through death**, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight.*”

Notice that this is an explanation of Christ suffering for our sins, the Just for the unjust. It is important that men NOT place the emphasis on Christ’s agony upon the cross—although that was a very real and efficacious agony. Much surface preaching of our time places stress upon the brutality Jesus suffered before and during His crucifixion. These were foretold in remarkable detail in the

22nd Psalm. You will note, however, that the Gospel's do not elaborate on Christ's atoning death in these matters, only mentioning them briefly (Matt 16:21; 17:12; 20:19; 27:34-50; John 19:23-36, etc.). With great care, the Spirit develops within us a spiritual view of Christ's death, not one of mere fleshly sympathy. His "death" was the real point, and includes all of the associated sufferings that preceded it. The Epistles never elaborate upon the details of the physical sufferings of Christ, but place the accent on His death, in which the purpose of God was fulfilled.

The phrase "made alive by the Spirit" is pregnant with meaning. From one view, this was **Jesus** taking up His life again (John 10:17-18). From another, this was Jesus being raised "by the glory of the **Father**" (Rom 6:4). From yet another, it was His resurrection through "the **Spirit of holiness**" (Rom 1:4). The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were all involved in Jesus' resurrection. The same body that went into the tomb came out of it. It did not see corruption, and was raised impervious to death. While there were other resurrections prior to that of Jesus, there were none like His. He was, in a very real sense, "the *Firstborn from the dead*" (Col 1:18).

Jesus took hold of His life again. His Spirit entered again into His body, causing it to rise from the dead. Commenting on this, Peter says, "And God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power"^{NASB} (Acts 2:24). Because it was God's purpose, He is said to have raised Jesus from the dead. Because Jesus was charged with the responsibility of laying down and taking up His life again, He is said to have done it. Because the Holy Spirit is the quickening Agent of heaven, Christ's resurrection is declared to have been accomplished "by the Spirit." Just as every member of the Godhead was involved in Christ birth (1 John 4:14^{Father}; Heb 10:5-9^{Son}; Matt 1:18-20^{Spirit}), so they were involved in His resurrection.

Christ was put to death in His human nature, but raised by His Divine nature. The point of this text is that what is born of God cannot be kept down. Just as Jesus came back from His suffering, so the saints will come back from theirs. Suffering is only a temporary experience, however lengthy it may appear. If we will ponder the suffering of Jesus in His flesh, it will equip us to bear up under any necessary grief we are asked to bear. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth," or makes alive (John 6:63). It was so with the Lord Jesus, and, in your measure, it will be so with you. Do not despair, dear believer, when you are asked to pass through floods and fire. They will not ultimately hurt you (Isa 43:2).

WHEN JESUS PREACHED TO THE SPIRITS

"^{3:19} . . . by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared . . ." ^{NKJV} Here is one of the most controversial texts in Scripture. The words "by whom" refer to the Spirit. "He" who did the preaching is Jesus. To my knowledge, this is the only place in Scripture where preaching is said to have been directed to "spirits." The spirits are said to have been in a place of confinement: "prison." The particular spirits are identified as the ones who were "disobedient" while God awaited the preparation of Noah's ark.

It is traditionally taught that this refers to the Spirit of Christ preaching in the person of Noah prior to the flood. I consider this to be a most difficult position to support.

First, Peter later refers to this incident, adding some significant information. "For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who **are** dead." (4:6). Note, these are not described as people who "were" dead," but who "are" dead. Also, "the gospel" was preached to them, and we have no record of Noah ever preaching good news of any sort. Before Noah ever started building the ark, God told him only eight people would be saved (Gen 6:18). There was no "gospel" for anyone else—not a solitary soul.

Second, the reason for the preaching is also given: "that they might be judged according to men

in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” Admittedly, this is a difficult expression. It indicates that God’s righteousness was upheld in sending the flood. Yet, His mercy was also vindicated in making provision for them to live before Him.

Third, It is good to remember there was no Divine law in Noah’s day, and “*where no law is, there is no transgression*” (Rom 4:15). Again, it is written, “*For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law*” (Rom 5:13). This puts those during the days of Noah in a special category, not to be compared with people in our day.

Fourth, the passage says Jesus “*went*” and preached to “*spirits in prison.*” The indication is that He did this between His death and resurrection. It does not seem reasonable to introduce the preaching of Noah at this time. The word “*prison*” is equivalent to “*the pains of death,*” which were NOT able to retain Jesus (Acts 2:24).

Fifth, the text does not limit “*the spirits*” to those who actually died in the flood. Methuselah and his son Lamech died during the 120 years Noah was building (Gen 5:27), and nothing in Scripture indicates either of them were among those cursed by God. There were doubtless also infants and others who were not morally responsible.

Sixth, the word “*preached*” is the exact word used for Christ’s declarations when He ministered among men (Matt 4:17,23; 9:35; 11:1). The single reference of the “*Spirit of Christ*” testifying in other personalities is also mentioned by Peter. He assigns that activity to the prophets who “*testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow*” (1 Pet 1:11). Nothing leads us to believe Noah ever so “*testified.*”

Seventh, on Pentecost, Peter said Christ’s soul as not “*left in hell (hades),*” or the abode of the dead (Acts 2:27,31). The preaching of reference doubtless took place while He was there. For all other spirits, it was a prison. However, it was not a prison for Jesus, for He made His exit from that realm at the precisely appointed time.

Behind this is the fact that God knows the hearts of all men. To assume that every person living during the building of the ark, or dying in the flood, was reprobate cannot be supported by the Word of God. Also, to assume that everyone heard Noah is absurd, for he was not a global evangelist but the builder of an ark. We know there are things to be learned after death. Abraham learned about Moses, who lived nearly 500 years later, after he died (Lk 16:29). Both Moses and Elijah learned of Christ’s death after they died, of which death neither of them spoke while alive (Lk 9:30-31).

Here the Spirit has said enough to whet our appetites, but not enough to build a religious dogma. Undeterred by His sufferings, Jesus preached while His body was in the grave, announcing the Gospel to formerly disobedient spirits. We know nothing more than that of this event. It will glorify God to stand before Him having believed this text.

LESSON #31

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{3:20b} . . . *while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.* ²¹ *There is also an antitype which now saves us; baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,* ²² *who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.*” (1 Pet 3:21-22, ^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

If you are a student of Scripture, you know they contain numerous statements that contradict commonly accepted theologies. For example, some men say “Believers cannot fall away.” The Scriptures say of believers, “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance*” (Heb 6:4-6). We have a text before us that contradicts certain opinions about baptism—baptism in water. The very spirit of the text will confirm the significant role baptism plays in our association with God. It will be declared as a line of demarcation between the old and new life of the believer.

SAVED BY WATER

“^{3:20b} . . . *while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.* ^{21a} *The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us . . .*”^{NKJV} The words “*while the ark was a preparing,*” or “*during the construction of the ark*”^{NASB}, convey the power and durability of faith. The instructions for building the ark are found in Genesis 6:14-22. It was “*450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high*” (Gen 6:15^{NIV}). The time Noah spent building the was probably around 120 years, particularly if he started immediately. Elsewhere we read, “*By faith, Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.*” (Heb 11:7). In one of the most informative verses in the Bible, it is written, “*And the LORD said, ‘My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years’*” (Gen 6:3). While some say this refers to the reduction of man’s normal span of life, that does not fit into the judgment at all. God did not have man’s length of normal life in mind when He said those words, for He was preparing to destroy all flesh. It would be absurd to speak of the average length of life in that kind of context. All through this time, God was “*waiting,*” being longsuffering with sinful humanity. While men often say this was a period during which the repentance of men was sought, there is no basis for such a conjecture in Scripture. It took that long to complete the ark, and that was what God was waiting for. If God could endure gross and irrecoverable sinners for that length of time, we should be encouraged that He can give us grace to endure suffering in our time.

“*Eight souls were saved by water.*” The phrase “*by water*” literally reads, “*by means of water.*” Contemporary versions read “*through the water,*” meaning the water was the agent of the salvation. The very thing that destroyed “*all flesh,*” became the agent of salvation for Noah and his household. This was a shadow of the final day, when the same glory that destroys the wicked will save the godly. As it is written, “*the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe*” (2 Thess 1:7-10). Too, the same waters that drowned Pharaoh and

his armies rose up in heaps to allow the children of Israel to pass through them. The same fiery furnace that destroyed those who threw the three Hebrew children into it, refused to kindle its flames upon the three young men.

“Baptism doth also now save us.” The flood waters of Noah were a type of our baptism. Noah emerged safe from the waters, believers emerge safe from the waters of baptism. Those, therefore, who say, “Baptism does not save us,” are simply wrong. We are *“saved by water”* as surely as Noah was. The water carries us through spiritual death to spiritual life. It stands between the curse and the blessing, the saved and the lost. The water is a passage through which we are identified with Jesus. In the *“water”* we die with Jesus, are buried with Jesus, and are raised with Jesus (Rom 6:3-8). Men who do not attach any value to baptism, choose to refer to it as an outward sign of an inward grace—something already possessed. It is best to speak of baptism like the Holy Spirit does: *“baptism doth also now save us,”*^{KJV} *“baptism now saves you,”*^{NASB} *“baptism that now saves you.”*^{NIV}

Just as the ark was not Noah’s invention, so baptism is not the creation of man. Both the ark and baptism came from God. Too, while the world must have derided Noah for building the ark, so ungodly men speak reproachfully of baptism. Noah and his family were also confined to the ark—completely separated from the rest of the world. So in baptism, men are *“buried with Christ,”* becoming separated from the rest of the world.

As with all Divine ordinances, the effectiveness of baptism is owing to the faith of the individual. Just as Noah’s ark survived the flood because he built it by faith, so our baptism saves us because it is undergirded by faith. That is why Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mark 16:16). No person should be ashamed of baptism.

WHAT BAPTISM IS AND WHAT IT IS NOT

“^{21b} . . . (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”^{NKJV} The Spirit now instructs us concerning the manner in which baptism *“saves”* us. This is a powerful expression, provoking much thought in the believer.

“Not the removal of the filth of the flesh.” The contemporary versions manage to obscure the meaning of this text by translating this phrase, *“removal of dirt from the body.”* However, the phrase *“filth of the flesh”* refers to a ceremonial procedure, much like those instituted under the Law. Hebrews 9:10 calls such procedures *“divers washings.”* A leper, for example, who had been cleansed, was to *“wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and wash himself in water, that he may be clean: and after that he shall come into the camp”* (Lev 14:8). Thus the defilement of his flesh was ceremonially cleansed, allowing him to come again into the camp. The man who let the scapegoat [that had the sins of the people placed upon it], was to *“wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward come into the camp”* (Lev 16:26). After the priest had sacrificed the red heifer [an offering for impurity], he was to *“wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp”* (Num 19:7). In all of these cases, the cleansing was ceremonial, or outward, in the flesh. It did not allow a person to come into the presence of the Lord, but only cleansed him for entrance into the camp once again.

Baptism is NOT that kind of cleansing. While *“water”* is involved, as well as outward action, it is not an empty and powerless ceremony like those of the Law. It is tragic that many view baptism from this point of view, as though heartless conformity to a code suffices to remove sin and bring one into the presence of the Lord for blessing. The effects of baptism are proof of its validity. The outward part of baptism is nothing of itself. It is a serious error to trust in the form, while lacking its content.

“The answer of a good conscience.” Other versions read, *“but an appeal to God for a good conscience,”*^{NASB} *“the pledge of a good conscience toward God”*^{NIV} *“an appeal to God for a clear conscience.”*^{RSV} Here the fundamental part of baptism is clearly spiritual, though it is joined to an outward activity. The *“answer,”* in this case, comes from God to the one who obeys the form of the doctrine (baptism) from the heart (Rom 6:17). The words *“appeal t to God for a good conscience”* emphasize that the believer, in his baptism, is seeking for a purged conscience (Heb 9:14)—a persuasion that he is pure and accepted by God. This kind of appeal was made by the Ethiopian eunuch when he said, *“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”* (Acts 8:36). The text confirms he did receive a good, or clear, conscience, for *“he went on his way rejoicing”* (8:39). A *“good conscience”* enables us to stand confidently before the Lord, appropriating grace to help in the time of need.

Now the Spirit returns to complete the thought about baptism saving us. It does NOT do so because we have obeyed an outward requirement. Rather, baptism obtains its effectiveness *“by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* To be more specific, it is in our union with the risen Christ that our appeal for a clear conscience is realized. That is something God Himself does. As it is written, *“For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin”* (Rom 6:5-6). Here our baptism is called being *“planted together in the likeness of His death.”* It assumes hearty acquiescence to the will of God. When this is done, God WILL raise us to, giving us a purified conscience.

Baptism, then, saves us by connecting us with the resurrected Christ. The effects of that union include a purified conscience—something every believer is represented as seeking. The emphasis of baptism is not being buried, but being raised. It is not being dead with Christ Jesus, but living with Him. That puts a distance between us and our world, like the flood put a distance between Noah and his world. With these things in mind, it becomes utterly absurd to argue about the necessity or effectiveness of baptism.

JESUS HAS GONE INTO HEAVEN

“^{3:22} . . . Who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.”^{NKJV} Jesus did not stay in this world. As soon as His work was completed, He went back to heaven. The Spirit frequently affirms this to be the case. *“So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received **up into heaven**, and sat on the right hand of God”* (Mark 16:19). *“And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried **up into heaven**”* (Luke 24:51). *“Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you **into heaven**, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven”* (Acts 1:11). The center of Divine activity is found in heaven, not upon the earth. Jesus was not raised from the dead to remain in the world, but to minister to His people from heaven. He *“has gone”* where we are going—where our citizenship is presently located. The objective is to get us where He is, not bring Him to where we are (John 14:3). Jesus went back to heaven, because this world was not a suitable place for Him to remain. He is now ministering in prospect of His enemies becoming His footstool, and His children being gathered to Him forever. The church must not lose this perspective.

“At the right hand of God.” Much is made of this in Scripture. The Spirit tells us He is presently making intercession for us from that position (Rom 8:34; Heb 8:1). The things He is dispensing from that station are to be sought (Col 3:1). He was seated *“at the right hand of the Majesty on high”* only after He had by Himself purged our sins (Heb 1:3). If, therefore, He is there, then our sins have been purged! That is how the child of God must reason. A single offering accomplished the purpose. As it is written, *“But this Man, after He had offered **one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God”* (Heb 10:12).

The “*right hand*” of God is His working side. The days when He worked mightily among men are referred to as “*the years of the right hand of the most High*” (Psa 77:10). Again, it is written, “*The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly*” (Psa 118:15-16). The significance of Jesus being “*at the right hand of God,*” is that God is presently working BECAUSE of the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son. Now, He is “*is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us*” (Eph 3:20).

God’s “*right hand*” is also the place of favor, confirming that everything Christ did in our behalf has been accepted and is being honored by God. That is precisely why He is “*able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God through Him*” (Heb 7:25). If He was not in good standing with God, He could not bring many sons to glory.

Powers subjected to Jesus. The range of powers and authorities subject to Jesus is staggering. All angels, principalities, and powers are subject to Jesus, whether they are good or they are evil. Holy angels and powers are dispatched by Jesus to minister to the heirs of salvation (Heb 1:13-14). They protect the saints, camping about them (Psa 34:7). Wicked angels bow at the feet of Jesus, and are not able to separate us from the love of God (Rom 8:39). The “*principalities and powers*” against which we “wrestle (Eph 6:12), are all subject to our Lord. He can rebuke them, and they will obey Him instantly. All powers have been “*made subject*” to Christ. This is something God has done. It is power or authority that has been “*given*” to Jesus (Matt 28:18).

All of this is calculated to encourage us to hold up under suffering. Like Noah, we are in the process of building an ark—preparing for the end of the world. When we suffer unjustly, let us remember that Christ suffered for us. When life becomes a burden, consider that Jesus is bringing us to God. Your baptism, prefigured by Noah’s deliverance, is a prelude to your coming salvation, to be revealed when Jesus appears again (1 Pet 1:5). Jesus has already been exalted, and He is our “*Forerunner*” (Heb 6:20). He has arrived ahead of us to ensure that we also arrive. He is exalted, and God listens to, and honors, Him. There is no power and authority that is not under Him, no influence, whether for good or evil, that does not answer to Him. Those who place their faith and hope in Christ have every reason to be joyfully optimistic – even in the midst of their suffering.

LESSON #32

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{4:1}Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; ² that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”

INTRODUCTION

The Spirit now shares with us the secret to gaining daily victory over sin. For those in Christ, sin still remains an issue. This is because we carry about in us the remnants of the “*old man.*” Although he has been crucified, yet enough life remains in him to call for our attention and demand to be dominant in our lives. He will not be subdued automatically, or without our personal involvement. In overcoming sin, there is a certain frame of mind that is imperative. It was first possessed by Christ Jesus, and it must now be possessed by us. Without this mind-set, it is not possible to subdue the flesh or resist the devil. If our thoughts are not shaped by proper perspectives and considerations, the devil and the world will gain the advantage over us. Although this is not a common teaching in professed Christendom, it is most essential. Once our thoughts dwell upon this matter, the essentiality of such a mind will become evident to us.

A FOUNDATION FOR GOOD REASONING

“^{4:1a} Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh . . . ”^{KJV} The word “*forasmuch,*” or “*therefore*”^{NKJV, NIV} builds upon the teaching that has gone before. It is a way of introducing the conclusion of the Holy Spirit and the deduction of faith. This is a powerful example of spiritual reasoning.

The suffering of Christ is now viewed from another perspective. First, it was seen as a vicarious suffering, in our behalf—one that led to His voluntary death for the sins of the world. Here, however, we are introduced to Christ’s suffering from a broader perspective. The focus is not on His death, but on the countenance of His soul throughout His life, being consummated in His death. When Jesus died, He suffered, “*the Just for the unjust*”(3:18). Now, however, we will behold His suffering as the thing that qualified Him for His atoning death—the suffering that kept Him from sinning. The remainder of our text will confirm, that this is the suffering of reference—the suffering of a holy life in an unholy world. His was the suffering of a pure spirit in the midst of a defiled realm.

By saying “*suffered for us in the flesh,*” the Spirit means Jesus entered into the realm of suffering because of us, or in order to save us. This is the point of Hebrews 2:14-17. “*Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same.*”¹⁴ In being made “*like unto His brethren,*” Jesus partook of the suffering of believers, “*that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God.*”^{17, NKJV} Because our salvation depended upon Christ’s intercession as well as His death, it was necessary for Him to taste of the bitter dregs of life, as well as the grievous cup of death. Thereby, He was made suitable for the work of intercession. Thus it is written, “*For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin*” (Heb 4:15).

Isaiah described the coming Savior as “*a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering*”^{NIV} (Isa 53:3). Although this suffering found its zenith in His death, it was present throughout His life. It is said of our Lord, “*Though he were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which he suffered*” (Heb 5:8). Jesus was “*obedient unto death,*” a process ended at the cross, but began when He “*increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man*” (Lk 2:52). All through

Christ's life, there was a category of suffering that resulted from His determination to do the will of His Father in the midst of an environment that militated against that purpose. There are several indications of this in Scripture.

When Jesus was preparing to raise Lazarus from the dead, He was surrounded by unbelief. It was a grief to Him, as is indicated by the following words. *"When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled"* (John 11:33). This is why He later *"wept"* – not because Lazarus died, but because of the rampant unbelief that dominated that place. As He made His way to the tomb, it is written, *"Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb"* (11:38). This is the language of suffering.

On another occasion, Jesus was in a synagogue, when He confronted a man with a *"withered hand."* The people, ruled by unbelief, *"watched Him closely, whether He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him."* After calling the man forward, and confronting the people with the propriety of doing good and saving life on the Sabbath day, it is written, *"And when He had looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts . . ."* (Mk 3:1-5). That was a form of suffering.

We must not fail to see this aspect of our Savior's life in the world. When He said, *"O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me"* (Mk 9:19), it was a grief to Him. Confronting the belligerence of the scribes and Pharisees, the hardness of the lawyers, and the *"little faith"* of His followers were all sources of sorrow to the Savior. He did not abandon His mission because of such things, but endured them, moving toward the final suffering of the cross. It was His endurance under the lesser sufferings that enabled Him to hold up under the greater suffering. He was a *"Man of sorrows"* before His death, as well as during it.

A MIND SUITABLE FOR SPIRITUAL BATTLE

"^{4:1b} . . . arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin."^{KJV} Here is a weapon that is not often emphasized—a proper *"mind."* Many a spiritual battle has been lost simply because a correct mind was not possessed. This is *"the mind of Christ,"* which approaches life in the only manner acceptable to God. Not only are we said to *"have the mind of Christ"* (1 Cor 2:16), we are also admonished, *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"* (Phil 2:5). It is a mind so determined to do the will of God, it will not be moved away from that resoluteness. This is precisely the mind-set that causes the child of God to *"suffer"* when confronted with sin, temptation, and hardness of heart in others. Those who are not afflicted by sinful influences, whether within or without, are simply not resolved to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The sixth chapter of Romans expounds being armed with *"the same mind"* as our Lord. This is the godly way of thinking, and is available to everyone who is in Christ Jesus. *"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin"* (vs 6-7). This mind takes hold of what has occurred in Christ Jesus. It reasons upon that basis, concluding that we have a primary response to God. *"Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord"* (v 11). This mind draws conclusions that enable the individual to resist the devil. *"Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof"* (v 12). It reasons in this manner: just as surely as I once yielded myself to sin, so now I can yield myself to God.

" . . . as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness" (v19).

Just as surely as there are wayward thoughts to be cast down, so there are spiritual weapons to

accomplish the task, As it is written, *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”* (2 Cor 10:4-5). A key part of that spiritual weaponry is a proper mind-set: arming ourselves *“with the same mind.”* An improper way of thinking makes men vulnerable to the devices of the wicked one.

Those who are in Christ Jesus are burdened with mortality, and grieved by the proclivities of the flesh. The condition is described in the following verses. *“And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves **groan within ourselves**, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body”* (Rom 8:23). *“For we that are in this tabernacle **do groan**, being burdened”* (2 Cor 5:4). The closer one is to Christ, the more pronounced and perceptible this groaning becomes.

“For he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin.” This has reference to the person who has armed himself *“with the same mind.”* It does not refer to Jesus, for Jesus did not sin, and thus could not *“cease”* from it. The text could remotely apply to Jesus in that after His death He never again will deal with sin in an expiatory way. But that is not the immediate intent of this verse. When we are *“armed”* with a resolute spiritual mind, even the intrusion of temptation hurts us, causing us to cry out, *“O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”* (Rom 7:24). Therein is a secret to overcoming sin. When even the attraction, or lure, to sin becomes offensive to us, we will not stumble thoughtlessly into it.

People yield to sin because it is not offensive to them. Faith, however, removes the *“pleasure”* from sin, knowing such things are only fleeting, and for a season (Heb 11:25). When sin hurts us, causing suffering, it becomes easier to avoid it. However, when this is not the case, men will not *“cease from sin.”* Sin must be seen as Jesus sees it. When that takes place, we are *“armed with the same mind,”* and will cease from sinning.

LIVING THE REST OF OUR TIME

“^{3:22} That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”^{KJV} When we are *“armed”* with the mind of Christ, we are equipped to live for God. The NIV reads, *“As a result, he does not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God.”* If Jesus suffered for us in His humanity, then it ought to be apparent to us that there is a higher motive for living than simply being in the world, taking advantage of its fleeting fancies. In this verse, the word *“flesh”* means life in this world, as in Hebrews 5:7: *“Who in the days of His (Jesus) flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears . . .”*

How are men to live? What is to be their motivation, and what is the objective of their life? That is the subject of our text. When we came into Christ, we became a new creation. As it is written, *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new”*^{NKJV} (2 Cor 5:17). At that time, we entered a period called *“the rest of our earthly life.”* It is separate and distinct from our former life, and devoted to a different objective. Life is not for the gratification of human desires (*“to the lusts of men”*), but to serve and please the Lord (*“the will of God”*).

While sin is altogether too common in the professed church, it is entirely out of order. In Christ we die to sin, and are freed from its dominion. We owe nothing to the flesh, and everything to Christ Jesus. Thus it is written, *“How shall we, that are **dead to sin**, live any longer therein? . . . Knowing this, that our old man is **crucified** with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we **should not serve sin**. For he that is dead is **freed from sin** . . . For sin shall **not have***

dominion over you: *for ye are not under the law, but under grace . . . Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh*” (Rom 6:2,6,15; 8:12). We have not been liberated to seek fleshly interests, or to become acclimated to this present evil world. The “*rest of our time*” is for the Lord.

Notice, “*the will of God*” is contrasted with “*the lusts of men.*” What God desires versus what flesh desires. Both are calling for our attention, but we cannot hearken to both—only to one. Spiritual life cannot be maintained while living for the flesh. Regenerate life cannot survive a fleshly emphasis. In my judgment, this is largely unknown. There is too much flesh in the average church, and it betrays a most grievous condition.

Jesus affirmed the one doing the will of His Father was His “*brother, and sister, and mother*” (Matt 12:50). He also made clear the one failing to do that will could not possibly “*Enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Matt 7:21). Jesus set the agenda for the people of God when He said, “*I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me*” (John 5:30). He came down from heaven, He said, “*not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me*” (John 6:38). How could any one hope to please the Lord or find a place in heaven by seeking their own will? It simply is not possible.

It is to be understood that every resource required for living to the will of God is supplied in Jesus. God’s “*Divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Pet 1:3). If this was not so, we could not live “*to the will of God.*” But it is so, praise the Lord. He has also given us the Holy Spirit, who assists us in this work, changing us from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

There is a parallel passage to our text found in the twelfth chapter of Romans. It emphasizes the role of the mind, and discovery and fulfillment of the will of God. “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove (discern, examine, or see whether a thing is genuine or not) what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God*”^{NKJV} (12:1-2).

Such a life is not an occasional thrust, but our vocation for “*the rest of our time*” in the flesh. We should beware of any religious thrust that allows for competitive interests, or does not make the will of God primary. Also, by living to the will of God, you will experience the greatest degree of satisfaction, and will be unashamed on judgment day.

LESSON #33

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{4:3} For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles; when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.⁴ In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.⁵ They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.⁶ For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.” (1 Peter 4:3-6, ^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

Life in Christ is not a mere discipline, or way, of life. In Him, we are given life itself—eternal life. A transformation takes place that cannot be understood by the world. Sensing the sharp conflict between the life of the believer and their own, those who are of this world speak evil concerning the saints. Their spiritual ignorance compels them to do this as a form of self-justification. They realize believers do not live as they used to, but do not know why. The testimony of the saints, however, is making the sinful accountable for their preference of this world. They have been given light through the lives of those who are themselves walking in the light. It is sufficient light to provoke them to earnest inquiry. This should be a source of great encouragement to us. It confirms the powerful influence of Christ dwelling within, even though it is not often acknowledged by those seeing it.

THE TIME THAT IS PAST IS SUFFICIENT

“^{4:3} For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles; when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.” ^{NKJV} However long we spent in sin prior to being translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son, it was enough! There is nothing of real value in that era of our lives, and we do well not to speak extensively of that time. As it is written, “*What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death*”^{NKJV} (Rom 6:21). When we were “*in the flesh,*” everything about our lives contributed to spiritual death, alienating us further from God. Thus it is written, “*For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death*” (Rom 7:5). Nothing about our former lives was proper or profitable. By saying we have spent enough time living in that manner, the Spirit does not suggest there was anything right about that time. Rather, He is showing us the unreasonableness of living to satisfy our flesh, rather than living unto God.

“*Gentiles*” refers to more than those who were not the Jews, or were not in a covenant relationship with God. The word is here used to denote those who know not God. Thus 1 Thessalonians 4:5 refers to “*the Gentiles who do not know God.*” Because they rejected both the testimony of creation and their conscience, and “*did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting*” ^{NKJV} (Rom 1:28). The manner of life now mentioned is the result of refusing to live with a mind to please God, and being turned over to a reprobate, or debased, mind.

When men do not know God, they cannot live properly. They are thus shut up to vanity, appropriately called “*the will of the Gentiles.*” This is the kind of conduct those who do not know God prefer and seek. Such living may differ in intensity, but never in nature. Those who “*know not God*” always live primarily for themselves. They are slaves of their fleshly appetites until they are delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every person in Christ once walked in self-will, “*doing the will of the Gentiles,*” or living

without due regard for the living God. The Spirit now mentions some of the things that characterize that type of living. He will reach into the lower part of the bottomless pit of fallen human nature, confirming that only Divine mercy kept us from occupying those lower realms. The seeds of all of these things are found in the flesh.

Lewdness. The KJV reads “*lasciviousness*,” the NASB “*a course of sensuality*,” the NIV “*living in debauchery*,” and the RSV “*living in licentiousness*.” This is the aggressive intention to satisfy base lusts of the flesh. It is wantonness, or a refusal to suppress the desire to indulge sinful appetites. It is shameless sinning, and indecent and outrageous sensual behavior. This type of living is heavily promoted in our time.

Lusts. This is longing for what God forbids—for things that defile, exclude one from God, and forbid entrance into the kingdom of heaven. It is a strong craving for things associated with the flesh—temporal things that bring satisfaction only “*for a season*” (Heb 11:25). Other versions use the word “*passions*,”^{RSV, NRSV} emphasizing how they drive men.

Drunkenness. The KJV reads “*excess of wine*.” The word strictly means “bubbling over with wine.” The idea is that the drink takes over and controls the individual, causing his mind to be unproductive, and all control to be lost. Men have become creative in providing such indulgences. They range from beer to whiskey, and all forms of drugs. Drunkenness is a grievous sin because it refuses to give ones powers to the Lord.

Revelries. This is night time carousing, in which sinful appetites are fulfilled with aggression. It is marked by indulgence, loudness, and excessive sinful behavior.

Drinking parties. The KJV reads “*banquetings*.” Others versions read “*carousings*.” The word used literally means “drinking bouts,” the height of stupidity and vanity.

Abominable idolatries. This is detestable idolatry that extends beyond the normalities of idol worship. Like the prophets of Baal, those engaging in such vanity do foolishly. When God is not known, this is the direction life takes. However long we spent in such vain pursuits, it is sufficient. Let us never give another single moment to such things.

THE WORLD DOES NOT UNDERSTAND

“^{4:4} *In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.*”^{NKJV} The word “*these*” refers to the horrendous list of sins just mentioned. Our former associates do not understand why we no longer live for such indulgences. They can only think of change in relation to certain disciplines of the body, or consultation from purported experts in human behavior. Such people know nothing of the “*new creation*,” all things becoming “*new*,” or old things “*passing away*” (2 Cor 5:17). They are ignorant of transformation (Rom 12:2), affection being placed on “*things above*” (Col 3:1-2), the cleansing of a conscience (Heb 9:14), or a compelling quest to “*know*” Christ Jesus (Phil 3:10). They imagine that a change in behavior is only a surface change, with the individual maintaining all of their sinful inclinations. Thus Alcoholics and Drugs Anonymous teach people they are still alcoholics and drug addicts. They only overcome their tendencies by following a regimented procedure and maintaining a new circle of kindred friends who are in the same state.

Former friends are “*surprised*”^{RSV} we do not “*run with them*,” or “*join them*” in our old manners, preferring their friendship and indulging in old appetites. They sense they are no longer our preferred companions. Life in Christ Jesus presents a new perspective for those who are of the world. They can detect we no longer belong to their order, but cannot account for the change. There is no earthly explanation for such radical alteration. Believers must learn to reckon on the strangeness of the life of faith to unbelievers, making no attempt to accommodate their behavior to

dull the edge of that testimony. While each believer is responsible for their own life, thoughtful consideration should be given to continuing to maintain any manner of life that leads sinners to believe we are no different from them. Satan will tempt us to culture worldly friendships and manners.

The words “*flood of dissipation*” refer to an indulgent manner of life in which the appetites of the flesh are cultured and gratified. The KJV reads “*excess of riot*,” and the RSV “*wild profligacy*.” This is a condition that finds “*flesh*” at the center of all basic consideration. Carnal appetites are considered primary, and satisfying them is seen as the greatest benefit. In this case, “*excess of riot*” is the flesh bubbling over, demanding gratification. It parallels James’ expression “*superfluity of naughtiness*,” or the “*overflow of wickedness*”^{NKJV} (James 1:21). In our day, there is a marked tendency to keep old appetites, giving them a religious flavor. Thus, we have been introduced to Christian rock music, Christian entertainment, and Christian comedians. It is not my purpose to condemn such things. However, each believer is responsible for cutting loose from the world, not embracing a form of godliness that allows for appetites to be kept in a different form.

Our former friends are not always provoked to ask a reason for the hope that is in us (3:15). Sometimes they are zealous to defend their own godless manners by “*speaking evil*” of us. Thus believers are seen as guilty of deviate behavior, while the “*Gentiles*” are perceived as normal human beings. Frequently those with whom we once companied “*speak against*” us as “*evil doers*” (2:12). They charge us with being inconsiderate, proud, and hypocritical. Even though we make no claim to being the only holy people, they charge us with thinking we are “*so holy*.” Sinners do not always fall at our feet, acknowledging, “*that God is in you of a truth*” (1 Cor 14:25). Sometimes they charge believers as Festus did Paul, “*Your great learning is driving you insane*”^{NIV} (Acts 26:24). It is even possible for former religious associates to say of us, as the people did of Jesus, “*You have a demon*” (John 7:20). Or, as the Jews said to the former blind man, whom Jesus had healed, “*Thou wast altogether born in sins, and dost thou teach us?*” (John 9:34).

Believers must not allow such false accusations to cast them down. The world reacts to us in this manner because they are seeking to justify themselves at our expense. It is our business to avoid arrogance or any form of pride, imagining that, of ourselves, we are better than our enemies. But when we set our faces toward heaven, running the race set before us, it will cause confusion among many former friends. Do not be discouraged by this.

DIVINE PREPARATION FOR GIVING ACCOUNT TO GOD

“^{4:5} *They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*”

⁶ *For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.*”^{KJV} We are to understand that those who have witnessed the change wrought in the new creation will be held responsible for their reaction to it. We will not adjust our behavior to make sinners more comfortable in our presence. They are accountable to “*turn aside*,” inquiring into the holy life, like Moses turned aside to behold the burning bush. It was precisely at the point that Moses turned to see that “*great sight*,” that God spoke to him (Ex 3:3-4).

The Lord “*stands ready to judge the living and the dead*,”^{NRSV} holding men in strict accountability. For many, accountability has to do with making ourselves responsible to one of our peers, to help us keep from committing sins into which we are easily drawn. There may be place for such accountability on an elementary basis, but it is certainly not the highest manifestation of spiritual life. Right now, God is ready and willing to judge those remaining alive, and those who have departed from this world. Jesus has done everything to prepare for that inevitable judgment. He has done something about sin, about the sinful nature, and about God’s indignation against sin.

There is no valid reason for a lack of preparation for “*the day of judgment*” (Matt 10:15; 2 Pet 2:9; 1 John 4:17).

Giving “*an account*” to God includes explaining our response to all of the benefits He has provided, whether it was the form of a godly testimony, the preaching of the Gospel, or the unseen wooing of the Holy Spirit. Men will give an account to Christ Jesus for their words (Matt 12:36), deeds (2 Cor 5:10), and thoughts (Heb 4:12; Psa 139:23).

These words are written to help the saints not to be unduly concerned about the malignment of wicked people. When they are subject to the abuse of men, their motives questioned, and they are censured and reproached, they are to remember not to avenge themselves. They are not to allow their spirits to be cast down when wicked men speak against them. The enemies of the saints will give an account for their treatment of God’s holy ones. That is punishment enough. They need no retaliation from us.

The Holy Spirit now alludes to the “*spirits*” mentioned in the third chapter (3:18). There, the “*spirits*” were identified as those who were disobedient in the “*days of Noah.*” Here, the society is broadened to “*them that are dead.*” The idea here is that those who passed away prior to the preaching of the Gospel, in this world, would not be unduly disadvantaged by the times in which they lived. The world is going to be judged by Jesus Christ (Rom 2:16; 2 Tim 4:1), and in view of the redemption which He has wrought (Acts 17:31). And how will it fare for those who did not hear the Gospel while upon the earth—those who died “*not having received the promise*” (Heb 11:39). What of people like Samson, king Saul, the Israelites who fell in the wilderness, and those who were “*disobedient in the days of Noah?*” These and others were judged for their sin, suffering death. Are we to assume none of them repented or desired the blessing of the Lord?

Is external judgment the necessary indication of Divine rejection? Indeed not! There were some in Corinth who became weak and sickly, and even died under the chastening hand of the Lord. Yet it is written of that very occasion, “*But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*” (1 Cor 11:32). Again, it was said of the infamous fornicator of Corinth, “*deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*” (1 Cor 5:5).

We are dealing with something driven by Divine knowledge, not appearance. God knows the people who would have believed if only they had heard the Gospel and seen the works of Jesus--like Tyre and Sidon (Matt 11:21), and Sodom (Matt 11:23). Such souls, now “*dead,*” had the Gospel preached unto them so God would remain just in judging them for their sin, yet be merciful to them on the day of judgment. This is, indeed, a profound truth, yet worthy of our embrace. We are to ponder it when we begin to think unmercifully of our enemies. I conclude, therefore, that no person will be lost who had a tender heart, even though they were not blessed to hear the good news in this world.

LESSON #34

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{4:7} But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. ⁸And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins. ⁹ Use hospitality one to another without grudging.” (1 Peter 4:7-9, ^{KJV})

INTRODUCTION

Faith approaches life in a unique way. Fleshly satisfaction becomes subordinate to preparation for eternity. Time and life are perceived as an investment in the world to come. In the context of the coming of the Lord and the end of the world, life is viewed quite differently than is common among men. The value of the brethren of Jesus is elevated when we consider these things. An eagerness to be of assistance to one another becomes paramount, and fervent love for the saints of God makes perfect sense. Although the contemporary church tends to ignore the “*end*,” or conclusion, of all things, due consideration of this reality goes a long way to resolving problems common among believers. The Holy Spirit will now use Peter to put us in mind of the reality of our situation. Once the message is grasped by faith, the appropriateness of the attending exhortations will become obvious, and compliance with them will not be burdensome.

THE END OF ALL THINGS IS AT HAND

“^{4:7} But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.”^{KJV} The words “*at hand*” mean “*is near*.”^{NIV, NRSV} It is “*the end*” that is near—the next significant event on the Divine calendar. From the language point of view, “*end*” means termination, conclusion, or cessation. But it is more than simply an abrupt close of things as they presently are. In Scripture, the word carries the idea of achievement, completion, and fulfillment. “*The end*” refers to the achievement of a Divine goal or purpose. Once the purpose for the “*earth and the fulness thereof*” is completed, “*heaven and earth shall pass away*” (Matt 24:35). The ultimate reason for the existence of all created things is this: the completion of God’s appointed purpose. Thus it is written, “*Jesus . . . whom heaven must receive until the times of restoration of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began*” (Acts 3:20-21). That “*restoration*” is the time when God will fulfill His word: “*Behold, I make all things new*” (Rev 21:5).

The Spirit frequently refers to “*THE END*,” and we do well to make it a matter of everyday consideration. For believers, such thoughtfulness will yield becoming sobriety and devotion. Jesus spoke of enduring “*to the end*” (Matt 10:22). He said the “*harvest*” of humanity is “*the end of the world*” (Matt 13:39). “*The end*” is the time when Jesus will deliver the Kingdom back to the Father, that He might be all in all (I Cor 15:24). Believers are urged to hold their hope firmly unto “*the end*” (Heb 3:6). “*Confidence*,” together with the “*full assurance of hope*,” are to be maintained steadfastly “*unto the end*” (Heb 3:14; 6:11). There is a grand objective that is driving the presence and history of the world. The conclusion of that objective is appropriately called “*the end*.”

It should be apparent the world will not end by some accidental or deliberate act of humanity, whether it be war or the theoretical imbalance of the “*forces of nature*.” “*The earth is the Lord’s*.” His purpose brought it into being, and that same purpose will bring it to a conclusion. This is accentuated by the expression “*the end of ALL THINGS*.” The reference, therefore, cannot be to the destruction of Jerusalem, as some erroneously teach.

The words “*at hand*,” or “*is near*,” are **not** time words, but **faith** words. Faith leaps over the constraints of time, taking hold of Divine utterance. It enables the believer to shape his life with

“the end” in mind. How frequently the Spirit uses this kind of language. “Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed . . . The night is far spent, the day is at hand” (Rom 13:11-12). “The Lord is at hand” (Phil 4:5). “The day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess 2:2). “Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!” (James 5:9). “Behold, I come quickly” (Rev 3:11). Faith compels us to live with a lively awareness of these realities.

The effect of this knowledge. Once the soul accepts the fact that the conclusion of everything is the next significant occurrence, a certain impact registers upon the soul. First, it enables us to approach life soberly, or with seriousness. Various versions read as follows: “*be ye therefore sober,*”^{KJV} “*therefore be serious,*”^{NKJV} “*be of sound judgment and sober spirit,*”^{NASB} “*Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled,*”^{NIV} and “*therefore be serious and discipline yourselves.*”^{NRSV} This is particularly relevant in our time and culture, when entertainment, jesting, and humor have been exalted. All of these things tend to dull the conscience and put the mind and heart to sleep. But this is NOT the time for such things, and the church should have no part in such an emphasis.

The prayers of God’s people are directly affected by their state of mind—whether or not they are sober, serious, or of sound judgment. The phrase, “*watch unto prayer,*” is also translated, “*for the purpose of prayer,*”^{NASB} and “*so that you can pray.*”^{NIV} On one occasion Jesus admonished His disciples, “*Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation*” (Matt 26:41). Again, when speaking of the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, Jesus said, “*Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man*” (Lk 21:36). A distracted and non-serious church will not be ready for “*the end of all things,*” because it will not be able to pray properly. If there is a single condition that emphasizes the spiritual jeopardy of our times, it is the lack of seriousness in the professed church.

ABOVE EVERYTHING ELSE

“^{4:8} **And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.**”^{KJV} The expression “*above all things*” is significant. It means more than “most importantly,” or “this is the most significant thing. The idea of “*above,*” in my judgment, is best illustrated by the mercy seat, which was on the ark of the covenant (Ex 25:21). The idea is not that it was more important than the ark of the covenant, but that it covered that sacred piece of tabernacle furniture. So it is with “*fervent charity.*” It is a covering that is to characterize all of life—a sort of spiritual umbrella that oversees all the affairs of life. No facet of life is to be excluded from this covering.

There is a reason why the word “*charity*” is used in the KJV. The “*love*” of reference is unique, and has no parallel among the sons of men. Even in English, the primary meaning of the word “*charity*” is “benevolent goodwill toward or love of humanity.”^{Merriam-Webster} This is love that seeks the betterment of another. It includes affection and preference, but extends far beyond them. The ultimate example of love is found in the Lord Himself. “*Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins*” (1 John 4:10). Not only did our Father have the ultimate affection for us, He made the ultimate provision for us. That is what “*charity*” does—it provides.

Because “*the end of all things is at hand,*” and sobriety and prayer are imperative, the people of God are to have “*fervent charity*” among themselves. Other versions read “*love each other deeply,*”^{NIV} “*maintain constant love for one another,*”^{NRSV} and “*preserve an intense love for each other.*”^{NJB} Our love for one another is not to be casual or merely formal. That simply is not acceptable. A profound consideration for one another is required in this verse. An intense desire for the brethren to gain the advantage in life is fundamental in “*fervent charity.*” **This is one of the primary evidences of identity with Christ.** “*By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*” (John 13:35). If this is true—and it surely is—where such love is not

obvious, there is no evidence of affiliation with Jesus.

One of the marks of the last times is this: *“the love of many will grow cold”* (Matt 24:12). Not only will professed believers leave their *“first love”* for Jesus Christ (Rev 2:4), they will also lose their preference for the people of God. An even more grievous situation will be found than once took place with Israel. God said of them, *“I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown”*^{NIV} (Jer 2:2). When the love for the Lord wanes, it no longer is possible to love His people—*“the brethren.”*

In an unprecedented way, this is taking place in our generation. It is seen in the lack of desire to assemble with followers of Christ. It can be detected in the demand for brevity and shallowness, as well as the desire for extracurricular activities. These conditions cannot be excused, or the claim of a growing and vibrant church maintained, where fervent love for believers is not found. The demand of the Spirit is a *“fervent”* love among the saints—one that cannot be quenched, and that is characterized by growth and intensity. If God Himself teaches us to love one another (1 Thess 4:9), who is the soul that can defend a lack of fervent love for those God has redeemed from the power of the enemy?

Still, the Spirit reasons with us on this matter. *“For charity shall cover the multitude of sins.”* This is no doubt an allusion to Proverbs 10:12. *“Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.”* The idea is not that of overlooking serious breaches of morality, such as that of the Corinthian fornicator (1 Cor 5). Rather, the reference is to personal wrongs, as well as an eagerness to forgive those who have trespassed against us (Matt 18:35). None of us is without fault, and all stand in need of forgiveness. When we refuse to look at, or divulge, one another’s weaknesses, we help to strength each other’s faith. God works through our love for one another to make progress in our weak areas. When we have a sin that *“so easily besets”* us (Heb 12:1), fervent charity among ourselves will be used of God to enable us to put such things away, lest we be turned aside from the way. If God *“so loved”* us, why should we not seek fervent love among ourselves?

USING HOSPITALITY

“^{4:9} Use hospitality one to another without grudging.”^{KJV} Other versions read, *“Practice hospitality,”*^{NASB} *“Offer hospitality,”*^{NIV} *“Be hospitable,”*^{NKJV} and *“Cheerfully share your home.”*^{NLT} This is a vastly neglected aspect of spiritual life. While sundry explanations are often provided for the lack of hospitality among *Christians*, they are never acceptable. The word *“hospitality”* literally means *“fond of guests,” “generous to guests,”* and *“kind to strangers.”* This is one of the qualifications for an elder, though often ignored (1 Tim 3:2). An elder is even to be a *“lover of hospitality”* (Tit 1:8). One of the endearing traits of the *“well beloved Gaius”* is that he faithfully ministered to both brethren and strangers. He brought them forward on their journeys for Christ (3 John 5-8). Among the qualifications for widows receiving support from the church is the following: *“if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints’ feet, if she have relieved the afflicted”* (1 Tim 5:10).

There are many examples of hospitality in Scripture. Martha received Jesus into her house (Lk 10:38). Zacchaeus did the same (Lk 19:5-6). Simon the tanner entertained Peter (Acts 10:6). Lydia received Paul and Silas into her house (Acts 16:15). Even the Barbarous people of Melita courteously received Paul and those shipwrecked with him (Acts 28:2). Phebe was noted for often refreshing the saints, including Paul himself (Rom 16:2). Onesiphorus was also distinguished for being hospitable (2 Tim 1:16). Rahab, of Jericho, and her household were saved because she was hospitable to the spies (Josh 6:17-25).

Hospitality was commanded under the Law (Lev 19:33-34; Deut 26:12-13). Through Isaiah, the Lord declared He called for the hospitable treatment of the poor (Isa 58:6-7). All believers are

exhorted, “*Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality*”^{NIV} (Rom 12:13). In a most telling admonition, the Spirit reminds us of the possibilities uncovered in hospitality. “*Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels*”^{NKJV} (Heb 13:2). Both Abraham and Lot entertained angels who came in the appearance of men (Gen 18:2-10; 19:1-3). Menoah and his wife, Samson’s parents, also confronted an angel who had the appearance of a man. Menoah offered “*the man*” (actually an angel) a nourishing meal (Judges 13:15-25). God once preserved the prophet Elijah through a hospitable widow (1 Kgs 17:9-16). Through her hospitality, the Lord miraculously sustained her meager supply, once thought to be adequate for only a single meal for her and her son.

You may remember that Jesus spoke of the day of separation as a time when the eternal destiny of people would be determined by their hospitality, or lack thereof, toward His people (Matt 25:31-46). The early church, filled with the freshness of grace, was unusually productive in this area. “*And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need . . . And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common*” (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32). We are not, then, speaking about some mere incidental of life. Many a soul has forfeited the blessing of the Lord simply because they have thought only of themselves. They did not practice hospitality, and thus experienced undue inconvenience and hardship that could have been avoided.

But this is not a mere law—an obligation laid upon the people to be heartlessly obeyed. Hospitality is to be practiced “*without grudging,*” or “*without grumbling*”^{NKJV} or “*complaining.*”^{NRSV} By so doing, we will come into an area of blessing precious few believers ever experience. “*Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, they [men, KJV] will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return*”^{NASB} (Lk 6:38).

Many godly works have been sustained and even enhanced because of thoughtful and hospitable expressions by fellow believers. When Jesus was among us, there was a cluster of hospitable women who ministered to Him “*of their substance*” (Lk 8:2-3). This is an area of especial benefit and encouragement when evil days are upon us.

LESSON #35

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{4:10} As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 4:10-11^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

The people of God have a great ministry to one another. This is not a mere obligation, but something for which salvation adapts us. Because of the complexity of the life of faith, and the many needs all saints have, the Lord has strategically placed each member in the body of Christ. There are no unnecessary or unimportant members. Each believer possesses spiritual qualities that bring advantages to other believers. Further, walking by faith tends to enhance those qualities, so they may be joyfully and profitably fulfilled. The life of faith also equips the believer to receive and benefit from the various dispensations of grace that have been given to the other members of the body. When we are ministering and being ministered to, life becomes a great blessing to us. Burdens are lightened, and joys are enhanced. This text will exhort us to minister with the ability that God gives.

EACH ONE HAS RECEIVED A GIFT

“^{4:10a} As each one has received a gift . . .”^{NKJV} Spiritual gifts are mentioned several places in Scripture. A wide variety are identified. Romans 12:6-8: (1) Prophecy, (2) ministry, or service, (3) teaching, (4) exhortation, (5) giving, (6) ruling, or leading, and (7) showing mercy. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10: (8) the word of wisdom, (9) the word of knowledge, (10) faith, (11) gifts of healings, (12) working of miracles, (13) discerning of spirits, (14) different kinds of tongues, and (15) interpretation of tongues (this passage also mentions prophecy, as Romans 12:6). 1 Corinthians 12:28: (16) Apostles, (17) prophets, (18) helps, and (19) administrations (this passage also mentions teachers, miracles, healings, and different kinds of tongues, as Romans 12:7 and 1 Cor 12:8-10). Ephesians 4:8-11: (20) evangelists, and (21) pastors and teachers (this passage also mentions Apostles and prophets, as 1 Corinthians 12:28). 1 Peter 4:10-11: (22) speaking (this passage also mentions ministry, as Romans 12:7). It is my understanding that these are not intended to be exhaustive listings. Further, each church was told of the gifts prevalent among them. In contradiction of some teaching concerning spiritual gifts, the Word of God nowhere mentions “the nine spiritual gifts,” a phrase regarded as most holy in some circles.

There are several key points the Holy Spirit makes about spiritual gifts. It will be apparent that He is not intending to provide us with a sort of manual of definition and proper usage. The thrust of this teaching far removed from the flesh and worldly wisdom.

01. We are to think soberly, or seriously, about this area of life in Christ (Rom 12:3).
02. The gifts are provided through “*a measure of faith*” that is received by all (Rom 12:3-4).
03. These gifts differ according to the grace that is given to us (Rom 12:6).
04. There are varieties of gifts, but they are given by the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:4).
05. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord dispenses them (1 Cor 12:5).

06. There are a variety of activities, but the same God who works in them all (1 Cor 12:6).
07. Each gift is given for the common good of all of the members (1 Cor 12:7).
08. The Holy Spirit distributes these gifts as He wills (1 Cor 12:11).
09. Each person is to perceive their gift as appropriate and needful (1 Cor 12:14-17)
10. God has placed the members in the body where it has pleased Him (1 Cor 12:18).
11. No member can say he has no need of the other members (1 Cor 12:21-25).
12. The gifts are for the equipping and edifying of the saints (Eph 4:11-16).
13. Gifts are to be ministered in accordance with the ability God gives (1 Pet 4:11).
14. The objective of these gifts is that God may be glorified through Jesus (1 Pet 4:11b).

Notice the assumption of our text. It does not read, “IF any man has received the gift,” but “**AS each one HAS received the gift.**” That gift is part of the new creation. It was placed in you when you were put into the body of Christ. Everyone has a spiritual gift, or ability. It has been granted by Divine discretion, and for the purpose of benefitting the people of God. No spiritual gift is for private enjoyment, but for the “*common good*” of the whole body. Every gift is harmonious with and complementary of the other gifts. When employed by faith and through grace, they will improve the brethren, enabling them to also minister their various abilities effectively. Further, men will grow in their use of them.

It is not the prerogative of men to determine which gifts are required or appropriate. Although men are prone to engage in such decisions, they are completely out of order in doing so. Further, nowhere are men admonished to decide which gifts are still in order, and which are not. All of that is under Divine administration. This is carefully and powerfully declared in Scripture. God places the members where He wills (1 Cor 12:18). The Holy Spirit has charge of the variety of the gifts (1 Cor 12:4). The various services performed by them are controlled by the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 12:5). The various activities are under the strict control of God Himself (1 Cor 12:6).

There is no room for controversy on this matter. No gift is to be denigrated, and none is to be unduly exalted. The point of our text is that they are to be employed in strict accord with the ability God gives. This is not an area of kingdom life to be studied and debated, but to be used for the glory of God and the edifying of His people. It is that simple!

MINISTERING GRACE TO ONE ANOTHER

“^{4:8} . . . **minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.**”^{NKJV} The book of Romans approaches ministry to one another from the standpoint of faith: “. . . *think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man **the measure of faith**. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office*” (Rom 12:3-4). First Corinthians approaches them from the viewpoint of their origin, the Godhead: “*Now there are diversities of gifts, but **the same Spirit**. And there are differences of administrations, but **the same Lord**. And there are diversities of operations, but it is **the same God** which worketh all in all*” (1 Cor 12:4-6). Ephesians majors on the effects of the various gifts, showing how they contribute to the spiritual maturity of the saints. “*For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*” (Eph 4:12-13).

Peter now associates these gifts with the grace of God. Romans declares faith is by “*measure,*”

appropriately adapting each believer to be profitable to the brethren. Here grace is said to be “*manifold*,” or has “*various forms*.”^{NIV} Not only, therefore, are we “*saved by grace*” (Eph 2:5,8), but the grace of God works through us in differing ways, bringing edification and comfort to those who are strangers and pilgrims in this world. In fact, grace is a stewardship—given from God to be handled by us. This marvelous verse reads as follows in the NIV. “*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*”

Is this not a refreshing thought? The grace of God is not only received, it is also administered by the very ones receiving it. The Apostles received grace (Rom 1:5), and faithfully ministered it through their preaching writing. Consider, for example, how effectively Paul ministered the grace that was given to him. Ponder how you have been profited by his writings. Behold what things have been opened to you through his Epistles, and how you have been made the better for it. **Powerful effects are wrought in the hearts of men when grace is faithfully ministered!**

I remember when the thought first registered on my heart that grace could be ministered **BY** me as well as **TO** me. Is it not written, “*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers*” (Eph 4:29). Grace brought us into Christ, and it has equipped us to be useful in Him. In his measure, each believer must seek to confess with Paul, “*But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*” (1 Cor 15:10). Even as a special measure of faith has been given to you, so grace has been specifically apportioned to you. In both cases, quantity is not the point, but ministry, or being used of God to give His people the advantage in life.

This is one of the profound secrets of unity among the people of God. As they minister to one another in the ability that God gives, a certain interdependence is created. God has graciously placed “*the solitary in families*” (Psa 68:6), giving them such advantages as challenge the mind, while comforting the heart. If a believer chooses to restrict his fellowship, cutting off this member and that member as though they had no kingdom worth, he shall deprive himself of needed grace. This is one of the great curses of sectarianism. It is why God will not honor divisions among His people.

When developing lawful preferences for fellowship, our text unveils a fundamental consideration. Where will I experience the most effective ministry? Where will I be able to use the abilities I have most effectively? From the standpoint of an assembly, there must be provision for the saints to be good stewards of the grace given to them. There must also be a format that allows for mutual edification and ministry. It is the responsibility of each believer to ponder his place in the body. Such pondering is not to produce confusion, but open the door for joyful ministry in God-ordained ways to those who are heirs of God.

SPEAKING AND MINISTERING W/GOD-GIVEN ABILITY

“^{4:11} *If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*”^{NKJV} Here, the Spirit refers to spiritual gifts in a very broad sense, narrowing the divisions down to two: speaking and serving. A number of gifts are included in each category. **SPEAKING:** Prophecy, teaching, exhortation, word of wisdom, word of knowledge, different kinds of tongues, and evangelists. **MINISTRY:** Giving, showing mercy, gifts of healing. Some gifts are themselves broad, including ministries in the areas of both speaking and serving: Apostles, helps, governments, leading, etc. The point of this text, however, is not **WHAT** is done, but **HOW** it is done.

By saying “*IF*,” the Spirit is not suggesting some are without spiritual abilities. Rather, He is

focusing on **all** speaking and serving. Both the NASB and RSV versions capture the sense of the text: "*Whoever speaks . . . whoever serves.*" The words are sobering, making no provision whatsoever for the flesh to express itself. No person is to attempt to serve God as a mere professional. None are to speak or serve as a mere elected officer of the church. Every aspect of a ministry is to be accomplished within the framework of faith and grace.

IF ANY ONE SPEAKS. Speaking to the saints of God is always a serious matter. Such times are occasions when God is to minister to His people through the speaker. They are spaces when the things of God are to become clearer, and the things of this world more disdainful to us. Many a poor soul is rarely exposed to such times. Regularly they are subjected to lectures and studies that are nearly altogether devoid of both faith and grace. Such speaking is not approved of God, and will not be blessed by Him. When one speaks for the Lord, it is to be "*as the oracles of God.*" The RSV reads, "*as one who utters oracles of God.*" The NASB reads, "*let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God.*" The NIV reads, "*as one speaking the very words of God.*" There are two sides to this. First, the Scriptures are to be the prominent part of the speaking. Divine utterances, such as the Law, are called "*the oracles of God*" (Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2; Heb 5:12). Second, the speaker is a spokesman for God, and is to speak with a lively sense of that circumstance upon his heart and mind. In my judgment, this rules out a significant amount of speaking that is being done in the name of the Lord. Further, if this verse is taken into the heart and seriously pondered by those speaking for God, it will significantly impact upon how and what they speak.

IF ANY ONE SERVES. Saints are admonished, "*by love serve one another*" (Gal 5:13). None of us live or die to ourselves (Rom 14:7). We have a twofold relationship. First to the Lord, and second to His people. Serving is not simply doing something nice. It is providing something that is needful—something that strengthens the person being ministered to. Ministering, or serving, is very broad. It includes such things as assisting with burdens, supplying needs, and showing mercy. But when serving is done, it is not to be mechanical, or without life. Rather, serving is done with the ability God has given. No person is asked to do something for which they are not equipped by God. This is another way of saying we are not to depend upon the flesh in our various ministries. Neither, indeed, are we to regard the abilities we have been given as small and inconsequential. God gives no such abilities.

There is a grand objective to speaking as the oracles of God and serving with the ability He gives. It is that God might be glorified "*in all things through Jesus Christ.*" Men ought to ponder how much glory God receives through what they speak and minister. Note also that God is glorified "*through Jesus Christ,*" not merely through what is said or ministered. Among other things, this indicates it is actually Jesus who, as the Head, is ministering through the various "*joints and ligaments*" of His body (Col 2:19).

Some may wonder what ability God has given to them, and how they may use it. This is made known to us as we live by faith and in fellowship with the Son. The Lord will faithfully lead us to see our role in His body. This is part of growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). It is involved in being changed "*from glory unto glory*" (2 Cor 3:18).

LESSON #36

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

^{4:12}***Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*** (1 Peter 4:12-13^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit consistently views life from the perspective of our relationship to Christ. He never addresses the saints as citizens of an earthly country, a fraternity of people connected by common earthly interests, or domestic families. While none of those things are condemned, they are not the area of blessing. Jesus is Himself the circumference of every good and perfect gift that comes down from above. In this text, even sufferings are viewed from a spiritual perspective. In this way, the whole of life is perceived as a preparation for the appearing of Jesus. This is true whether it is viewed as a stewardship, a ministry, a time of receiving from God, or one of suffering shame for His name. Jesus is the Polestar around which all of life is centered. He has devoted, and is devoting, Himself fully to our salvation. It is not unreasonable, therefore, that we should devote ourselves fully to Him, viewing every aspect of life as associated with Him, and sustained by Him.

DO NOT THINK IT STRANGE

^{4:12}***Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you . . .***^{NKJV} The Epistles address the people of God as “*Beloved*” no less than fifty-one times. The Lord Jesus is also referred to as “*the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6), and God’s “*beloved Son*” (2 Pet 1:17). This is, therefore, no insignificant expression. Think of some of the ways it is used in reference to God’s people. “*Beloved of God*” (Rom 1:7), “*Dearly beloved*” (Rom 12:19), “*beloved in the Lord*” (Rom 16:8), “*beloved brethren*” (1 Cor 15:58), “*elect of God holy and beloved*” (Col 3:12). The expression denotes a special people, in whom the Lord has a special interest, and for whom the saints have a special preference. This is heart language, as when Paul said to Philemon, “*I have you in my heart*” (Phile 7). It is not a mere formal approach.

Something was ahead for these saints—something that would be difficult to bear. Peter calls it a “*fiery trial*.” Other versions say “*fiery ordeal*,”^{RSV} “*painful trial*,”^{NIV} and “*testing by fire*.”^{NJB} Note, he does not refer to a coming “tragedy,” “disaster,” “calamity,” or “catastrophe.” The word “*fiery*” views difficulty as a period of refinement—of purging the dross from our lives. Peter has already referred to this part of spiritual life in the first chapter. “*That **the trial of your faith**, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ*” (1:7). It is **not** enough simply to possess faith. It must be put to the test to prove its worth. The test is not for God’s benefit, **but for ours**—to show us the superiority of faith, and its nature to overcome the world (1 John 5:4). Many professed believers do not consider the **effect** trials have upon their faith. They think too much in the flesh, and not enough in the Spirit. This is owing to the distorted emphasis that is being promoted by the contemporary church. It accents life in this world, rather than life in the “*heavenly places*,” to which we have been raised (Eph 2:6). This moves people to think of their flesh instead of their faith, when trials come upon them. Ponder how your faith has survived! How marvelous it is! Hardship need not cause you to cease trusting God, but can actually make your determination stronger. When this happens, your faith has passed the test of trial.

He refers to a “*TRIAL*,” **emphasizing the objective served by the occurrence, rather the experience itself.** Here is a perspective that is imperative if we are to gain the victory in life! The

very word “*trial*” confirms the experience is in the hands of the Lord, not men. It is not happenstance, but is under the strict and beneficent government of Jesus. He will not allow the test to go too far (1 Cor 10:13), and will stand by us throughout its duration. Your trials are a fulfillment of Malachi 3:3. “*And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.*” Trials do affect what we offer to God.

These saints were suffering for righteousness sake. From the standpoint of morality, they were suffering “*wrongfully*,” enduring something they did not deserve (Matt 5:10; 1 Pet 2:19; 3:14). But they must not allow their minds to dwell upon this. Their suffering must be seen from a higher perspective—as a “*trial*” being governed by their Lord.

With a large heart, the aged Apostle tells believers not to “*be surprised*” by the ordeal that is taking place among them.^{NSRV} It is not to be viewed as something unusual—a sort of intrusion into their lives that will uproot them from fellowship with God. Being in the world is like being in the furnace of trial. This is the ONLY place where we will be tested, so we should not be astonished when trial comes. Our trials belong to us (1 Cor 3:21-23).

Precisely what this trial was is not declared. Some have thought it to be the destruction of Jerusalem, which would occur about five years later. However, this is unlikely since the letter is not written to people in Jerusalem, but to “*strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*” (1:1). Jesus taught men to prepare for conflict and trial. He said it this way, “*If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me*” (Matt 16:24). The cross is associated with testing, and with ultimate death. It provides a view of spiritual life that is sorely needed in our day. The testing of our faith can confirm you are fully capable of bearing YOUR cross.

PARTAKERS OF CHRIST’S SUFFERINGS

“^{4:13a} . . . *but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings . . .*”^{NKJV} Sufferings are not merely to be borne, but become the occasion for rejoicing. How frequently rejoicing is associated with suffering: “*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, **for my sake**. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad. . .*” (Matt 5:11-12). “*When men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, **for the Son of man's sake**. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy*” (Lk 6:23). “*And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame **for His name***” (Acts 5:41). “*Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations*” (1 Pet 1:6). How can we rejoice when we suffer?

First, the **reason** for the suffering is our identity with Jesus! The suffering, therefore, becomes **proof** of that identity! It substantiates that we do not belong in this world—that we are being oriented for another place and another ministry. When the world does not receive us, it proves we do not belong to its order. When life in this world is made hard because of trials, it confirms we are out of place here. To us, the world is like the wilderness to Israel. They were only going through it in order to get to Canaan. The knowledge of these realities makes for rejoicing in the Lord.

Suffering also confirms our reward **IS** great in heaven (Matt 5:12). It is there already, “*reserved*” as our inheritance (1 Pet 1:4). While we are waiting to receive that inheritance, we are being tried and sifted in order to be worthy of it. As it is written, “*that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer*” (2 Thess 1:5). When our hearts take hold of this verity, rejoicing is made possible, strengthening the heart.

Our sufferings—those which are “*for righteousness sake*,” and because we are not of the world—

are a form of Divine fellowship. We “*partake of Christ’s sufferings.*” We are thus “*suffering WITH Him*” (Rom 8:17). We are actually experiencing the same things He did, because He was not of this world. For that reason, “*as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation*” (2 Cor 1:7). As believers, in our sufferings, “*the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body*” (2 Cor 4:10). In our “*fiery*” and refining trials, we become a visible testimony to the life of Christ. It is His life within us that has induced the trial. From the Divine perspective, that Life requires testing and proving for **our** sakes, in order that we might gain confidence and assurance. From the viewpoint of our oppressors, they behold how Divine life reacts to rejection and abuse. From the vantage point of the powers of darkness, they behold the invincibility of our faith, being unable to cause us to curse God or abandon the way of righteousness.

Christ has left a residue of suffering behind, to be experienced by those He has “*received to the glory of God*” (Rom 15:7). This aspect of spiritual life was revealed through Paul. “*Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up **that which is behind** of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church*”^{NKJV} (Col 1:24). Other versions refer to the sufferings as “*that which is lacking.*” This does NOT mean Christ’s sufferings are deficient. It DOES mean salvation makes provision for us to share in the experience of them. Our sufferings have no remedial power, and cannot save anyone. In them, however, there is a level of fellowship with Jesus that cannot be found elsewhere. These sufferings are also “*for*” the church, or people of God. They are the result of siding with the saints, being unashamed to be openly included in their number. They are also sufferings that result from our commitment to bring spiritual advantage to them at all cost.

These sufferings are measured. They are not the same for everyone, but are in harmony with our abilities, degree of spiritual insight, and measure of faith. That is why the words “*to the extent,*” or “*inasmuch*”^{KJV} are used. The NASB reads, “*to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ.*” That “*degree*” or “*extent*” can be joyfully endured by your faith. It is not more than you can bear, but is specifically tailored for you by a loving Father. They will fit you for the wonderful inheritance that is reserved for you in heaven.

GLAD WHEN HIS GLORY IS REVEALED

“^{4:13b} . . . *that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.*”^{NKJV} Even in their sufferings, those in Christ receive strength to rejoice. Now, because we believe in Jesus, and even though we do not see Him, we “*rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*” (1 Pet 1:8). But that is nothing to compare with the joy that is to come. Always, and without exception, the eyes of the believer are lifted upward. Saints are admonished to consider the future more than the present. Hope, which is faith in its forward posture, is set on what is coming. It refuses to settle down in this world, or place the emphasis on things that are seen and experienced here.

The future is not an end of itself. That is, it is not simply held out to us as though to say, “things will get better.” There is an event on the horizon of Divine destiny that mitigates all adversity, and neutralizes every cup of trouble and sorrow. It is the coming, or appearing, of the Lord--when His glory will be revealed. The coming of Christ is to faith what the star was to the wise men from the East.

The revelation of Christ’s glory is when God will unveil Who Jesus really is, showing Him in unrestricted splendor. Scripture says it this way. “ . . . *until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords*” (1 Tim 6:14-15). At that time, we will see Jesus “*as He is*” (1 John 3:2). For those in Christ, the sight will be perfectly harmonious with the realities grasped by faith. Jesus in “*His glory*” (Matt 25:31) will differ not one whit from the understanding of Him that faith has

brought to us. The glorified Christ will be but an enhancement of the One we trusted, and upon Whom we have believed.

We will not be startled by what we see, but gladdened by the sight. Even when we did not see Him, we rejoiced with “*joy unspeakable.*” When the hindering influences of time, and the obscuring effects of the things that are “*seen*” are removed, our hearts will leap for joy at the sight of Jesus. One of the primary reasons for this is the transforming effect of seeing Jesus in all of His glory. As it is written, “*When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory*” (Col 3:4). Again, it is written, “*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 John 3:2). The cause that will affect our final change is the sight of the glorified Christ! That is why it is written, “*For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body*” (Phil 3:20-21). For those who believe, that is a most pleasant prospect!

Presently, our faith is preparing us for the time when we will see the Lord “*as He is.*” Further, our trials are perfecting and enhancing our faith. They are leading us to rely more completely upon the Lord, and more strongly anticipate His return in glory. The refiner’s fire confirms there is a final fire that will consume the earth and the things that are in it (2 Pet 3:10-12). As our faith is refined, we are being brought to a point where “*exceeding joy*” will erupt from us at the appearing of Jesus Christ. That is not something that might happen. It is something that WILL happen for believers. That is WHY the Lord tries and refines us through suffering. Does that not make the yoke of Jesus “*easy,*” and His burden “*light*”? Your heart can embrace this without fear of contradiction of disappointment.

The realities affirmed by this text expose the folly of much of the religion of our day. There is a noticeable absence of any emphasis on the return of Jesus Christ. Men have chosen to argue about Christ’s return rather than to anticipate it. Myriad of churched people have never heard a single message on, or discussion of, Christ coming in glory. Not one gram of value can be assigned to any professed *Christianity* or *teaching* that does not make a prominent place for the return of Christ Jesus. God is going to “*show*” His Son in all of His glory, and is devoted to readying His people for that event. How, then, can any neglect of this teaching be justified? When Jesus is seen in His glory, we also will be seen in ours? We will then be liberated from every vestige of sin’s curse, and attain the great inheritance to which we have been appointed. Christ’s return is to be anticipated.

LESSON #37

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{4:14} *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.* ¹⁵ *But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.* ¹⁶ *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.*” (1 Peter 4:14-16^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

Because of the inevitability of suffering, the Holy Spirit provides extensive teaching to enable us to properly assess hard experiences. There is a vast area of blessing to be realized in the very process of suffering. The closer an individual is to the world, the greater the distance between that person and the blessing of reference. There are also matters that are best revealed to us in the crucible of suffering. There we learn more about the Lord, the provisions that belong to us, and ourselves. Who but the Lord could enable such benefits to come from hard experiences? There is no attractiveness in suffering itself, and our teaching must never insinuate that is the case. It is the thing revealed by that suffering that brings the blessing. Our text will confirm this is the case, showing that certain sufferings do **not** yield blessing to the believer. The child of God is to give diligence to avoid these sufferings, for they do not bring a blessing, nor are they commendable.

IF YOU ARE REPROACHED FOR THE NAME OF CHRIST

“^{4:14} *If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.*”^{NKJV}
Reproach is a bitter experience of life. One must be strong to bear it. One of the strong expressions of its impact upon the soul is found in the 22nd Psalm. “*But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*” David experienced this in measure, the Lord Jesus tasted of it in a full measure. Such reproach is like “*a sword in my bones*” (Psa 42:10). How vividly this is expressed in the 69th Psalm. “*Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness*” (69:20).

Reproach is verbal. It is a taunting of believers, when they are defamed, reviled, disparaged, insulted, and chided for their faith. For some, these are harder to bear than the confiscation of their goods, or even bloody persecution. Many who could stand a beating for their faith, cannot stand to be reproached or reviled. This is the very reason why some compromise their faith, close their mouths, and avoid any visible appearance that would cause people to think they are different. Jesus told His disciples there was a blessing to be had in reproach, and our text confirms it. “*Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake*” (Lk 6:22).

What does it mean to be “*reproached for the name of Christ?*” It is being insulted because you obviously belong to Christ and live for Him. It is because you wear His name, are a Christian, believe in Him, and speak for Him. Jesus put it this way: “*If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you*” (John 15:19).

BLESSED (happy) ARE YOU. This is a profound blessedness, and a deep happiness. It is not laughing, smiling, or being merry. This takes place in the human spirit, where the Holy Spirit is bearing witness to the individual (Rom 8:16). Personal reproach because we belong to Jesus becomes the evidence our reward in heaven **IS** “*great*” (Matt 5:11-12). The **REASON** for the reproach brings a blessing, not the reproach itself. The knowledge of that present blessing makes the reproach tolerable. Without that knowledge it is too heavy.

THE SPIRIT OF GLORY AND OF GOD. The sense of the phrase is, “*the Spirit of glory and the Spirit of God*”^{NRSV} rests upon us. This experience was prophesied by Isaiah as belonging to the Savior Himself (Isa 11:1-3). When, therefore, the world reacts to us as they did to Jesus, it is not merely because we have tried to imitate Him by means of rules and regulations. It is because His nature is within us. He is abiding in us, and revealing Himself to us and through us. It is His life that is being revealed in our body (2 Cor 4:10). Our flesh is not capable of seeing this, and thus views reproach quite differently. One of the great curses of walking in the flesh is how it makes men react to reproach. When, however, we walk in the Spirit, we will be able to see circumstances during reproach that will bring great joy and solace to our hearts. God and Jesus have found a home in us, abiding in us (John 14:23). **That** is why the world levels reproach at us.

ON THEIR PART. This latter phrase is missing in contemporary versions of the Scripture. However, as John Gill notes, “**The clause is wanting in the Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions, but is in all Beza’s Greek copies, excepting one, and is also in the Arabic version.**” There are two sides to reproach: the side of the one reproaching, and the side of the one being reproached. On the part of the reproacher, evil is being said of “Him”—that is, of the Lord. This is Jesus in general, Who had the Spirit without measure. It is Spirit Himself because His work is being blasphemed and ridiculed, for it is His work that causes our enemies to reproach us.

ON YOUR PART. On the part of the reproached, the Lord is glorified both by the reproach received and our response to it. Thus we are “*unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish*” (2 Cor 2:14-15). Christ’s life within us has elicited the same response toward us as was experienced by Him. The world has not changed. Consequently, while we are being changed “*from glory unto glory,*” it will lash out against us just as it did toward the Lord Jesus, to whose image we are being conformed.

SUFFERING FOR THE WRONG THING

“^{4:15} ***But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters.***”^{NKJV} Because of the subtlety of our adversary, and the presence of our own flesh, the Spirit reminds us there is a suffering that is **not** blessed. It is associated with sin, or acting in contradiction of the nature of God. This is a view of holiness from the abstinence point of view. Holiness consists of two sides. First, there is living “*soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.*” Second, there is “*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*” (Tit 2:12). The Spirit now deals with the second side.

The world and shallow religion will not allow the grouping of these transgressions. They do not appear worthy of being placed in the same class. A “*murderer*” is thus viewed by many as infinitely more reprehensible than a “*busybody.*” And, indeed, there is a sense in which one sin is of a greater magnitude than the other. **The Spirit is not insinuating that all of these sins are on the same level, but that all of them deserve punishment.** Divine Law can instruct us on this point.

A “*murderer*” is condemned to death by God Himself. “*Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man*” (Gen 9:6). The Mosaic Law likewise condemned the murderer. “*He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death*” (Ex 21:12). The Spirit confirms God still has such a requirement. Political rulers are said to be God’s ministers, “*for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil*” (Rom 13:4). To suffer “*as a murderer*” is not to suffer verbal reproach, but to be put to death. God’s word is that “*none of you*” is to suffer in this way. This brings no glory to God.

Under the Law, “*a thief*” was not punished in the same way as a murderer—but he **was** punished. Depending on what was stolen, the thief had to make it up to the owner. If he killed or sold what

was stolen, he had to restore five times what he took (oxen), or four times (sheep). If he was found with the stolen article, he had to restore double. The minimum restitution in all cases of thievery was “double” (Ex 22:1-10). Again, God’s word is that “*none of you*” is to suffer for such things. This brings no glory to God.

An “*evildoer*” is any other type of “*criminal*”^{NIV} or “*wrongdoer*.”^{RSV} It is someone who infringes on the rights of others, making life more difficult for them. It is the opposite of the expression found in Romans 13:10. “*Love worketh no ill to his neighbor.*” An “*evildoer*” breaks the laws of both God and man with respect to considering others. Such a person is inconsiderate of both God and man, seeking to gain personal advantage by causing disadvantages to others. Again, God’s word is that “*none of you*” is to suffer for such things. This brings no glory to God.

A “*busybody in other men’s affairs*” is a trouble-maker that interferes, or intrudes, in other men’s concerns. This is a “*meddler*,” who leaves his own affairs to become involved in things that do not concern him. Jesus described such as one trying to take a speck out of another’s eye, while having a log hanging out of his own (Matt 7:3-5). The Spirit admonishes us to mind our “*own business*,” while giving diligence to be quiet and do our own work (1 Thess 4:11). We are told of some who neglected their own affairs to dabble in the business of others. “*For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies*” (2 Thess 3:11). The Spirit also mentioned younger women who learned “*to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not*” (1 Tim 5:13). Such reprehensible conduct cannot be justified. Again, God’s word is that “*none of you*” is to suffer for such things. This brings no glory to God.

All of this is involved in keeping ourselves “*pure*” (1 Tim 5:22). It is part of pursuing “*peace with all men*” and “*holiness*” (Heb 12:14). We will not be able to avoid suffering altogether. There is reproach for the name of Christ that is the occasion for blessing, and can yield great joy to the believer. Reproaches for wrong doing, however patiently they are endured, are not commended by God. They have nothing to do with our reward in heaven.

SUFFERING AS A CHRISTIAN

“^{4:16} ***Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.***”^{NKJV} Here is one of the three places the word “*Christian*” is found in Scripture (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16). In all three cases, the word reflects the world’s view of believers. In Acts 11:26, “*The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.*” In Acts 26:28, wicked Agrippa said to Paul, “*Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.*” Our text speaks of suffering “*as a Christian.*”

Some teach this was a Divinely given name, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 62:2: “*and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.*” This view also appeals to the original word from which “*called*” is translated, saying it means “*called by God*,” or Divinely named. There are reasons that do not allow for this interpretation, regardless of etymological concerns. First, no believer ever referred to himself as a “*Christian.*” Second, no congregation of believers is ever called “*Christians.*” Third, no promises are addressed to “*Christians.*” It is inconceivable that these conditions could exist if the name “*Christian*” was Divinely given. God gave the name “*Jesus*” to His Son, and repeatedly referred to Him as such. He gave the name “*Abraham*” to Abram, and from that point on so referred to him. But this is not the case with “*Christian.*”

The word “*Christian*” means “*of or pertaining to Christ; a follower of Christ.*” Believers were referred to in this way because of their obvious identity with Jesus Christ. They were not merely His followers by profession, but in manner of life and teaching as well. As you already know, many

people wear the name “Christian” who are received by the world, and treated as friends and associates. But this will not be the experience of anyone who exudes the life of Jesus. It will at once become apparent to the world such an one is separate from them. As a result, they will cause them to suffer,

And what is the suffering one to do under such circumstances? First, the child of God is not to be “*ashamed*.” He is not the one who is wrong! “*Shame*” involves embarrassment, feeling defeated, and being disgraced. Those reproached for the name of Christ must not be ashamed of Him or His Gospel. Here, the believer must follow the Lord, of Whom it is said, He “*endured the cross, despising the shame*” (Heb 12:2). The world looks down upon the believer, but the believer looks down upon the shame, despising, or thinking less of, such an experience. This is involved in not being ashamed. I wonder if Peter did not vividly recall when He thrice denied the Lord out of a sense of shame.

The believer must, however, have more of a response than simply not being ashamed. He is to “*glorify God IN THIS MATTER*,” i.e., in the suffering itself. The perspective here is the same as that declared to the Philippians. “*For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*”^{NKJV} (Phil 1:29). Believing AND suffering for Jesus’ sake are both gifts from God. Both have been “*granted*” to us “*in the behalf*,” or for the sake of, Christ. That is, God is honoring Jesus when He grants us grace to believe on Him. He also honors the Son when He grants us the privilege of suffering with Him that we might also reign with Him (2 Tim 2:12).

Life in Christ Jesus involves two kinds of experience. First, we are brought into accord with heaven, and made suitable for Divine fellowship. Through God’s great salvation, we are readied for heaven, tasting of the heavenly gift and the powers of the world to come. Our association with God through Christ brings great blessing and benefit to us. Second, we are thrown into conflict with this present evil world, which recognizes we no longer belong to its condemned order. That association produces suffering and reproaches.

Both of these experiences (believing and suffering for His sake) are from God. Therefore, we can glorify Him for both. The blessings associated with believing confirm that we are accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6). The reproaches of this world confirm that we have been so changed by the grace of God that the world knows we are separate from it. But, we must walk in the Spirit and live by faith to see these things. If we live too low, the clouds of doubt and fear will hide these realities from us. The Holy Spirit is using Peter to lift us up into the realm where all things are clearly seen. Thank God for that!

LESSON #38

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{4:17} *For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?* ¹⁸ *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* ¹⁹ *Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*” (1 Peter 4:17-19 ^{KJV})

INTRODUCTION

The Spirit has been instructing and exhorting the saints concerning suffering. They are not to consider it strange when they are given bitter herbs to eat, and gall to drink—at least not while they are in this world. The world is to us what the wilderness was to Israel when they were en route to Canaan—it is the place of testing and proving. Suffering is to be viewed as testing—a period of refinement, when our faith is tried and refined. Our sufferings are only “*if need be*” (1:6). They are the arena in which salvation is “*received*” (1:6-9). But none of us are to suffer as evil doers, or because we have wandered away from God. When suffering “*as a Christian*,” none are to be ashamed, but rather “*glorify God in this matter*” of suffering for righteousness sake. Our text now reasons with us concerning these realities, telling us WHY they are so. This is foundational reasoning that applies to many things. The Spirit will show us its relevance to the sufferings we endure.

JUDGMENT MUST BEGIN AT THE HOUSE OF GOD

“^{4:17a} *For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God . . .*”^{KJV} There is a view promulgated among believers that leads them to expect outward blessing and external prominence in this world. Men are taught they are to always be “*the head and not the tail*” (Deut 28:13) of circumstance, that poverty is “*the curse of the Law*,” and that suffering is an intrusion caused by sin. Our text speaks of suffering “*as a Christian*” and giving glory to God in that very matter. Now an additional perspective is given.

When God begins to deal with us “*as with sons*” (Heb 12:7), “*THE TIME IS COME.*” As we will see, God does not deal with all men alike, or at the same time. When He says He is “*no respecter of persons*” (Acts 10:34), it does NOT mean He treats all men alike, as this text will affirm. When we come into Christ, we come to a new time. This is not only a time of general benefit, but one of special affiliation with the Living God.

Some have assumed this text is speaking about the destruction of Jerusalem. That supposition is too absurd for extensive comment. The Jews and Jerusalem are not called “*the house of God*,” nor is it where judgment “*began*,” nor can it be termed “*us*,” as follows. **The chastening of God is the particular focus of this text.**

God DOES judge the wicked of this world, as evidenced, for example, in Egypt, the Canaanites, the Philistines, and Syria. But He judges His people FIRST. This was true under the Old Covenant. As it is written, “*As I have done to Samaria and her idols, Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols? Therefore it shall come to pass, when the LORD has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, ‘I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks’*” (Isa 10:11-12). Judgment began “*at the house of God.*” There is where He placed the greatest blessing, and there is where the greatest fruit was to be found. As Jesus said, “*For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more*” (Lk 12:48).

Another classic example of this truth is found in the ninth chapter of Ezekiel. There God announced His judgment upon His own people. It would be of such fierceness that ears would “tingle” when they heard of it (Jer 19:3). The Lord had invested of Himself in Israel, and was going to bring them into account for not taking it seriously. God spoke to Ezekiel of spiritual beings that had “charge of the city” of Jerusalem (9:1). He called these beings to Himself, telling them to bring their “destroying weapons.” These were to wreak havoc in the city, having no mercy on anyone. They were charged, “let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity” (9:5). BEFORE the destruction began, a special servant was told, “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (9:4). These were to be excluded from the destruction (9:6b). A most precise approach was to be taken in the punishment. The men were told “**BEGIN AT MY SANCTUARY**” (9:6a). In my judgment, the Spirit is particularly hearkening us back to this text. Amos also stated this principle: that judgment begins with the house of God. “*You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*” (Amos 3:2).

By saying, “*the time has come,*” the Spirit means this principle has been brought to its highest expression in this day. Now that more has been given, more is required. If God had the closest regard for those to whom He committed His oracles, how much more will He have for those who have been forgiven and received His righteousness? He will surely chasten them, as it is written, “*But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world*” (1 Cor 11:32).

Remember, chastening has to do with partaking of God’s holiness, not merely paying a penalty for our sin (Heb 12:10). This world is the ONLY place where purging and cleansing may be realized. When, therefore, we suffer, we are to understand God is dealing with us “*as with sons*” (Heb 12:7). If He allows the wicked to break forth upon us, it is because we are being refined. If we suffer for righteousness’ sake, it is because our reward is “*great in heaven.*” Sufferings are never a mere happenstance. They are one of the means through which God deals with us and brings us to perfection.

IF IT BEGIN WITH US – IF WE ARE SCARCELY SAVED

“^{4:17b} . . . and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?”
NKJV If God judges the godly, what will He do with the ungodly? If He is exacting in His treatment of the righteous now, what will be His manner of dealing with the unrighteous then?

When considering the apparent ease the ungodly enjoyed, it caused some confusion for Asaph, writer of the 73rd Psalm. He said he was “*envious of the foolish*” when he saw their “*prosperity*” (v 3). They did not seem to have “*trouble as other men,*” but prospered in the world and increased in riches (v 4-12). He, on the other hand was plagued all day long and “*chastened every morning*” (v 14). However, Asaph’s thoughts abruptly changed. He had an experience and consideration that altered his entire view. “*Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction*” (vs 17-18). Considering the “*end,*” or conclusion, of the unrighteous will cause their success to appear a snare, and a narcotic that puts to sleep.

Notice, the difference between “*us*” and “*them*” is obeying the Gospel. Obeying the Gospel is believing the record God has given of His Son. That faith enables the believer to overcome the world, for perceiving the truth of Christ, and maintaining that perception, causes the world to lose its attractiveness and power (1 John 5:4-11). Those who are overcome by the world do not believe Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:5).

SCARCELY SAVED. These are certainly arresting words. On the surface, they seem to contradict expressions like life “*more abundantly*” (John 10:10), “*so great salvation*” (Heb 2:3), pouring out the Holy Spirit upon us “*abundantly*” (Tit 3:5-6), and an “*abundant entrance*” into the everlasting kingdom (2 Pet 1:11). Some other versions accentuate this seeming contradiction. “*If it is hard for the righteous to be saved,*”^{NIV} “*If it is difficult for the righteous to be saved,*”^{NASB} and “*If the righteous are barely saved.*”^{NLT} Some believe Peter is referring to a statement made by Solomon. “*If the righteous receive their due on earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner!*”^{NIV} (Prov 11:31).

The meaning of the text is not that we will be “*scarcely saved*” when we stand before God in the judgment. That is when an “*abundant entrance*” will be ministered to us, and we will stand “*faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy*” (2 Pet 1:11; Jude 24). This is referring to our experience in this world, when we are sailing through treacherous waters, as it were, and exposed to storms and various trials of our faith. We are being “*tried by fire,*” and come safely to land, like those shipwrecked with Paul, only by the grace of God (Acts 27:43-44). Even at the judgment itself, we “*shall be saved; yet so as by fire*” (1 Cor 3:15), passing the test of Divine judgment. Those who speak of a simple salvation are in error. It is no small task to bring those, who were once enemies and alienated in their mind through wicked works, to stand at last without a fault before God. There are siftings and trials in this life, with hardships and difficulties. Only faith is equal to these experiences, and only faith will enable us to stand with joy before the Lord.

With this in mind, “*where will the sinner and the ungodly appear?*” What will be the portion of those, who have indulged the lust of the flesh, been disobedient to the Gospel, and remained unlike God in their ways and thoughts (Isa 55:7-8)? This is to be weighted in view of the present experience of the godly. Rather than asking, “*Why do the righteous suffer?*”, or “*Why do bad things happen to the godly?*”, there are other questions that should be asked. “*If the righteous suffer, then what will be the final end of those who are unrighteous?*” “*If the righteous are put to the test, will not the unrighteous also be put to the test in the end?*” The seeming success of the “*sinner and the ungodly*” is short-lived. They are in “*slippery places,*” where a split second can change the whole picture, like it did for Herod (Acts 12:22-23). Their sin is putting them to sleep, causing them to think this world is the only world, and this time is the only time. But there is an ultimate “*end*” to which they will come. It will **begin** with their appointed death and judgment. If we ponder the present suffering of the saints, we can see the end of the ungodly more clearly.

IN VIEW OF THIS, WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

“^{4:19} *Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*”^{KJV} How, then, shall we handle suffering? How should we conduct ourselves in the difficulties and sorrows of life? What is our response to be when we suffer at the hands of men for righteousness sake, or in chastening in order that we might be “*partakers of His holiness.*” Let it be clear, this is not suffering that comes because we are evildoers. Rather, it is suffering that is experienced while we are living by faith and walking in the Spirit.

First, such suffering is to be seen as “*according to the will of God.*” The hard times of life are not apart from Divine control. Job could not suffer until Satan was given the right to afflict him. Even then, the affliction was strictly measured, and “*according to the will of God.*” In the first wave of affliction, Satan was told, “*only do not lay a hand on his person*”^{NKJV} (Job 1:12). The second wave was accompanied with the restriction, “*Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life*” (Job 2:6). Therefore, the phrase “*according to the will of God*” does NOT mean God **wants** us to suffer. If He has “*no pleasure in the death of the wicked*” (Ezek 33:11), you may be sure He finds none in the suffering of His children. The meaning is that suffering is bounded by the will of God. Satan can go no further than God prescribes. In suffering, Divine intentions are served. Apart from

those purposes, suffering cannot even occur in the people of God. In this case, suffering for righteousness sake, or because we are the children of God, is better than a murderer being put to death.

COMMITTING THE KEEPING OF OUR SOULS. To “*commit the keeping of our souls to Him*” is to “*entrust,*” or turn our souls over to Him. This does **not** mean God has no charge of our souls unless we commit them to Him. It **does** mean this is the secret to God working “*all things together for our good*” (Rom 8:28). Thus, we will be changed from one stage of glory to another in this world, and finally be “*like Him*” when we “*see Him as He is*” (2 Cor 3:18; 1 John 3:2). As childbirth comes through travail, so our conformity to Christ’s image comes through suffering (Rom 8:17). Committing our souls to the Lord is submitting to that appointed process. It involves “*casting*” all our care upon Him (1 Pet 5:7), and trusting in the Lord with all of our heart (Prov 3:5-6).

All of this presumes an acute and cultured consciousness of the Lord and His will. No person who is continually unmindful of the Lord can commit the keeping of their soul to Him, particularly in suffering. Part of knowing the Lord, one of the marks of the New Covenant (Jer 31:34), is the consideration of Him in all of life’s circumstances. Both living and dying are approached with this dominating persuasion: “*we are the Lord’s*” (Rom 14:8). A religion, therefore, that robs people of this consciousness, makes it impossible for them endure persecution and chastening. It also deprives them of the strength to commit the keeping of their souls to God.

God has pledged Himself to “*keep*” those who rely upon Him. The 121st Psalm says it this way, “*He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who **keeps** you will not slumber. Behold, He who **keeps** Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your **keeper**; The LORD is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, Nor the moon by night. The LORD shall **preserve** you from all evil; He shall **preserve** your soul*”^{NKJV} (vs 3-7). He is abundantly able to keep us from “*falling*”, or stumbling (Jude 24). Those who commit the keeping of their souls to Him have this promise, “*For the LORD will be your confidence, And will keep your foot from being caught*” (Prov 3:26).

There is a perception of the Lord that is possessed by those who trust him to keep their souls: “***a faithful Creator.***” The idea is that God faithfully protects and preserves what He has created. Remember, those in Christ are a “*new creation*” (2 Cor 5:17). They are “*created in Jesus Christ*” (Eph 2:10), and their “*new man*” was created by God “*in righteousness and true holiness*” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). That is the sense of “*Creator*” in our text, not merely the fact that He created the worlds. However, if a person does not believe the Lord created the heavens and the earth, how could he ever believe God has, in salvation, created a whole new person. The faithful, knowing God has made them, are convinced He can also sustain them, keeping them unto “*the end.*”

LESSON #39

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{5:1} *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:* ² *Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;* ³ *nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;* ⁴ *and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*” (1 Peter 5:1-4 ^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

As is apparent throughout the New Covenant writings, the body of Christ does not run on automatic pilot. There are intricate involvements throughout the body that must be urged along by exhortations and admonitions. Nothing is taken for granted, particularly the responsibilities of the various gifts and ministries put in place by God. The different functions assigned by God are to be fulfilled with an acute awareness of the Lord Himself, and our ultimate accountability to Him. The people of God themselves are to be the focus of the ministries, with a strict regard to their nourishment and strengthening. If you have been in Christ for any length of time, you know this is not the popular view of ministry. It has actually become fashionable for the leaders of the church to ignore the saints in favor of recruitment or some form of religious entertainment. All of this has left the saints weak and malnourished. Our text will present the Divine resolution to that circumstance.

ELDERS ARE EXHORTED

“^{5:1} *The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed.*”^{NKJV} The word “elders” is not to be equated with “elderly,” or the aged. The word used here is translated “presytery” in 1 Timothy 4:14, and refers to the OFFICE of a bishop, or elder (1 Tim 3:1). Terms used for this office are “elders” (Tit 1:5) “bishop” (Tit 1:7), “overseers” (Acts 20:28), “presbytery” (1 Tim 4:14), and “pastor [shepherd]/teacher” (Eph 4:11). Each term presents a unique aspect of this “office.” “Elder” emphasizes spiritual maturity. “Bishop” places the stress on spiritual leadership. “Overseer” is another form of “bishop.” “Presbytery” is another form of “elder.” “Pastor” places the accent on shepherding, or feeding and caring for the flock. “Teacher” points up the means of feeding, which is opening up the Word of God.

The eldership represents an “office,” or function, placed within the church by Christ. It is governed by certain requirements, as specified in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, along with other texts. This is not a mere formal office, where men hold titles, yet ignore the appointed work—a practice altogether too common in many churches. Elders are “made overseers” by the Holy Spirit, and are to “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28). They are fulfilling a Divinely appointed role, set in place to give spiritual advantages to the saints.

God has always placed “elders,” or mature leaders, among His people. Under the Old Covenant, Israel also had “elders”—leaders that functioned under the primary leader, Moses. One of the first assignments given to Moses was to “gather the elders of Israel together” (Ex 3:15). This was not simply the older Israelites, but the leading men among them. On the evening of the Passover and exodus from Egypt, “the elders of Israel” were to select lambs for their families (Ex 12:21). When the Ten commands were given by God, Moses first placed them before “the elders of the people” (Ex 19:7). Among each of the twelve tribes, there were “elders and officers” (Deut 31:28).

In Jesus’ day, this office had been corrupted. “Elders” were still among the people, but they were usurpers of the office. On one occasion, Jesus’ disciples were criticized for not adhering to

“*the tradition of the elders.*” Jesus countered, their traditions “*transgressed the commandment of God*” (Matt 15:2). The “*elders*” were among the group from which Christ suffered “*many things*” (Matt 16:21). “*The elders*” joined a conspiracy with the chief priests and scribes on how they might take Jesus captive subtly (Matt 26:3). They also “*took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death*” (Matt 27:1). They had corrupted the office!

The early church also had elders. When the brethren determined to send relief to certain poorer saints, they sent it “*to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul*” (Acts 11:30). Paul and Barnabas “*ordained elders in every church*” when they revisited them (Acts 14:23). When the early church considered the question of the acceptance of the gentiles, the “*apostles and elders*” were called together to do so (Acts 15:2). Certain decrees were made by “*the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem,*” which were to be kept by the new churches (Acts 16:4). When Paul left the productive region of Ephesus, he “*called for the elders of the church*” there, to give them instruction (Acts 20:17).

Now Peter addresses “*the elders*” who were “*among*” the brethren to whom he wrote. These were not regional authorities, but lived “*among*” the ones they shepherded. Peter writes as an elder himself, engaged in feeding the flock of God. Although an Apostle, like Paul, he was also an elder or teacher (2 Tim 1:11). Among other things, this shows the lofty nature of this office.

The Apostle then sites his credentials. He certainly was not voted into the office he held. Rather, he was a witness to the “*sufferings of Christ*” – i.e., an eye witness. He not only knew that Jesus suffered unto death, but knew WHY He did, and the benefits that accrued from those sufferings. He also was participating in “*the glory*” that followed those sufferings, being himself transformed and made a partaker of the Divine nature (1 Pet 1:11; 2 Pet 1:4). He was partaking of the same glory that will be fully unveiled at the coming of the Lord. **These qualifications required that he nourish the people of God.** Furthermore, Peter’s thankful acceptance of them also compelled him to feed the saints. He asks elders to do nothing he himself does not first do. An excellent example, indeed!

SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK OF GOD

“^{5:2} *Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³ nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.*”^{NKJV} And what are “*the elders*” to do? We will find they are not elders emeritus, with an honorary title, but having no responsibilities. They are not business administrators, or the deciders of corporate policies and procedures. Elders are not church bosses. All of that has been borrowed from the Roman Catholic heresy, and has no part whatsoever in the Kingdom of God.

“**Shepherd the flock of God.**” Emphasizing what the shepherd does, the KJV reads, “*FEED the flock of God.*” The RSV reads, “*TEND the flock of God.*” The Basic Bible English version reads, “*Keep watch over the flock of God,*” and the NLT reads “*Care for the flock of God.*” Caring for God’s flock involves both nourishing them and protecting them from the wolves who would devour them. The people of God have been placed into their care, and “*elders*” are to take the matter seriously. They are to see to it that the people are not overtaken with spiritual illness and malnutrition, or ravaged by the false doctrines of pretentious ministers. Notice that the people are not the elders’ flock, but “*the flock of God.*” Although they are individual sheep, they are a collective flock. There is a group aspect of life in Christ. **There are things that can only be received from God in a group setting.** One has only to review the teaching of Jesus and the writings of the Apostles to confirm this is the case. Your own heart will also attest to the truth of this observation.

Because of the nature of true shepherding, it is **not** to be done “*by compulsion,*” or “*constraint.*”^{KJV} It is to be accomplished “*willingly,*” or with the heart—voluntarily. Those who have no heart for **feeding** God’s flock will do it miserably. If there is no driving desire to nourish and build up the saints of God, that very condition disqualifies the individual from being an “*elder.*” One might as well think of an unwilling Savior, as an unwilling elder. We might as well think of coming to an unwilling heavenly Father, as being advantaged by an unwilling elder. All of this presumes real elders are godly and mature.

The “*flock of God*” cannot be cared for by one who seeks financial gain from that work. The elders who rule well, devoting themselves to the Word and the doctrine, are to be counted “*worthy of double honor,*” or pay (1 Tim 5:17-18). However, that cannot be the motivation for the elder. Rather, he is to approach feeding the flock of God “*eagerly,*” or with a “*ready mind,*”^{KJV} or “*eager to serve.*”^{NIV} When they are with the saints of God, elders should have some food for them: some spiritual nourishment, some keen kingdom insight, some heavenly perspective. It will not do to frantically put something together on Saturday night, or speak spontaneously to them with little or no personal involvement. However gifted a person may appear to be, willingness and eagerness involve pouring oneself into the feeding of the flock of God. This means walking in the Spirit and living by faith. It also requires sensitivity to the sheep, and a perception of their needs. It should be glaringly apparent to you that this type of leader is exceedingly rare among the churches.

Elders are not to dominate, or lord over, the people of God. They are not kings over them, but servants to them. Like Paul, they do not have “*dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy*” (2 Cor 1:24). They are not to seek to control the conscience of God’s flock by dictating what they are to believe, or give them the official positions of the sect. They are to “*feed the flock of God,*” taking the protective and considerate oversight of them with zeal, determined that none of them will be put at a spiritual disadvantage because of their neglect, or be found lacking at the appearance of Christ.

The “*elders*” are to be “*examples to the flock.*” The flock should be able to safely and productively “*follow their faith*” (Heb 13:7). They are to be an “*example*” of a trusting one, a *model* of one who is growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). Elders are to be patterns of spiritual maturity, and a sample of those who are overcoming the world and being changed from glory unto glory. They are living out the life of God before the face of the flock, and doing so in a perceptible manner. Where these things are not found, the office of an elder is being usurped and disgraced. “*Elders*” who are not “*examples to the flock*” are a hindrance to them. Only those who “*feed the flock of God*” should be considered real “*elders,*” made overseers by the Holy Spirit Himself.

AND WHEN THE CHIEF SHEPHERD APPEARS

“^{5:4} *And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.*”^{NKJV} What a marvelous incentive is held out to “*the elders.*” Such an motivation is necessary for the work into which God has called them. They are “*among*” the flock (v 1), and the flock is “*among*” them (v 2). Their responsibility is not a seasonal one—like a monthly board meeting. They are with “*the flock*” and “*the flock*” is with them. They need some encouragement to fulfill their role with zeal, faithfulness, and expectation. They are not to do their work out of a sense of compulsion. Nor, indeed, are they to shape their ministry for remuneration. What, then, will be their strong motivation. It is the appearance of the “*Chief Shepherd!*”

Why is Jesus called “*the Chief Shepherd?*” It is because He is the **primary** Shepherd, under Whom all other shepherds operate, and to Whom they are accountable. His shepherding sets the tone for all valid shepherding. Elsewhere, Peter refers to Jesus as the “*Shepherd and Bishop of your souls*” (2 Pet 2:25). His is a ministry to the “*inner man,*” bringing sustenance and care to the

“inward man.” The manner in which Jesus cares for the church sets the tone for the work of “the elders.” He “nourishes and cherishes” the church, and so must they (Eph 5:29). If their activity is not related to Christ’s present ministry, it is out of order, invalid, and to be abandoned with haste. The “Chief Shepherd” is the Standard, not the bylaws of the institution, or the preferences of the eldership.

And what is it about “the Chief Shepherd” that is so critical? **He is going to APPEAR!** God is going to unveil Him before an assembled universe (1 Tim 6:15). He is the One for whom the church is being prepared—“the bride, the **Lamb’s wife**” (Rev 21:9). In keeping with the ministry of the Apostles, “the elders” are to aim at presenting the flock among them “as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2). A flock that is faithfully fed and cared for will be a source of joy to “the elders” in that day. In their measure, they will be able to say with Paul, “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For you are our glory and joy” (1 Thess 2:19-20). The importance of our stewardship is seen in the glory of Christ’s return! If “the elders” have conducted their ordained work with that day in mind, they will not be disappointed when the Son of Man appears! But if they have not, it will be a day marked by fear and dread. How solemnly this is accented by the words of the Spirit. The flock is reminded to “submit” to those who are “over” them, “for they watch out for your souls, as **those who must give account.**” In deep consideration of this reality, the people of God are urged, “Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you” (Heb 13:17). Each of us is being led by someone more advanced than ourselves. We do well to assist them to have a joyful and productive ministry among us.

But it is not only the appearance of the “Chief Shepherd” that is to be considered by the under-shepherds. Of His return Jesus said, “And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev 22:12). This is of particular relevance to our text, for “the elders” are involved in a “work.” As it is written, “This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires **a good work**” (1 Tim 3:1). Those who do “the work” well “feed the flock of God,” zealously, taking responsibility for its care and nourishment. They are governed by the thrice-spoken words of Jesus to Peter, the writer of this Epistle: “Feed **MY lambs . . . Feed MY sheep . . . Feed MY sheep**” (John 20:15-17). If ever there was a “great commission,” it is that one! Those “elders” who neglect that sacred work are standing on the precipice of eternal ruin!

And what will the Lord do for those sensitive and alert “elders” who cared for His Father’s flock and His bride-to-be? He will give them “the crown of glory that does not fade away.” It will be a unique crown, especially suited for “the elders” who took their ministry seriously, bringing spiritual advantage and blessing to the saints of God. There will be some form of recognition that is not afforded to everyone, just as there will be for Apostles and Prophets. Their reward will reflect the nature of their labors, and project out into eternity, never fading or diminishing in its glory and recognition. I do not doubt that the work of “the elders” is a preparation for an even grander ministry in the “ages to come,” where a rich and satisfying area of responsibility will be given to them.

LESSON #40

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{5:5} Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.’⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:5-7 ^{NKJV})

INTRODUCTION

Every kingdom has its laws, or principles, by which it is maintained. Those laws form a perimeter within which favor and well-being are promoted. The Kingdom of heaven also has principles that govern its affairs and constituents. They are a framework within which the favor of God is guaranteed, and within which personal advancement in grace is realized. These laws differ from those at Sinai. They are for those who have been reconciled to God, whereas the Law from Sinai was to people whose heart was far from the Lord. Those in Christ have a basic bent toward God. His laws are written upon their minds and put into their hearts. They delight to do His will, and find great blessing in doing so. If this aspect of Kingdom life is not seen, or if the mind of the flesh dominates the individual, the things required of believers will appear unreasonable. Our text provides a classic example of this. It is a strong appeal to your faith.

SUBMISSIVENESS AND HUMILITY

“^{5:5} Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for ‘God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble’”^{NKJV} Everyone in Christ has responsibilities before God. No one is exempt from duty, or put into a position where only the duty of others is to be considered. This is contradictory to the flesh, which thinks only of self, and wishes to impose restrictions and obligations upon others, while accepting none itself.

The Younger People. While addressing the “*elders*,” the Spirit is careful not to create an environment in which all of the attention is turned upon the obligations of those so placed by God. Here is one of the solemn exhortations for the “*younger*” among the saints. Those of inferior age are to submit themselves to those advanced in the Kingdom. While this may appear quite elementary, it is virtually unknown in our part of the world, and especially among those who profess the name of Christ. Rather than submitting to their elders, younger believers are actually being encouraged to isolate themselves, having special leaders and a special agenda. But this is not wise. A young Christian is to be “*an example of the believers, in word, in conversation [conduct], in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity*” (1 Tim 4:12). This very requirement is why they are to submit themselves to their elders. This submission is not a formal and legal one, but a practical and believing one. The submission is not simply because the elders are older, but because they are more experienced in the manner of the Kingdom. This arrangement is provided by God Himself to allow for the development of young spirits in Christ Jesus. While there is to be a wholesome respect and honor for the aged among us, this text goes further than that. It teaches the younger to seek, through their submission, to gain a better understanding of spiritual life by humbly submitting to the elders among them. Too, their submission becomes an encouragement to “*the elders*” to enter more heartily into their good work.

All of You. Submissiveness is not only for the younger. Wherever grace from God has been given for a ministry to the saints, all of them are to be submissive to that ministry. God has “*dealt to every one a measure of faith*” designed to profit the other saints—to bring spiritual resources to them (Rom 12:3-7). Submitting to one another is yielding to the edification other members are gifted to provide. It is clear from this, that the people of God do not function under a one-man rule.

There are various gifts placed within the body, and all members are to submit to them. When submissiveness is found throughout the body of Christ, significant spiritual growth will be realized. This submission is described in Romans 12:10 as “*in honor preferring one another.*” Ephesians 5:21 refers to it as “*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*” This is the opposite of agitation, turmoil, and fightings among professed believers, as in James 4:1.

Be Clothed with Humility. Humility is like an over-garment that covers every aspect of our persons. It involves modesty and “*lowliness of mind,*” which is not thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think. It is the opposite of strife and the insistence of having one's own way, and moves one to “*esteem others better*” than self (Phil 2:3; Rom 12:3). Men are not naturally humble, and are thus admonished to put it on as a cloak. One has said that everyone by nature has “the soul of a king.” Humility is the defeat of that propensity, and the appropriation of a considerate and submissive spirit. True humility recognizes the poverty of nature. Thus it seeks benefit from God alone, who often ministers that benefit through the other members of the body.

The Attitude of God. In order to assist us in our determination to be humble and submissive, the Spirit reminds us “*God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*” To “*resist the proud*” means God is opposed to them—militantly resistant. Thus the NIV and NASB read “*opposes the proud.*” God is the enemy of those who champion their own cause and interests, and do not submit to Himself and those He has endowed with grace. On the other hand, God gives loving favor, or grace, to the humble. It is as though God had two hands. With one He crushes the proud, and with the other He gently holds and cares for the humble. We must never allow ourselves to drift into theological notions that rob us of this perspective. God is mindful of how we conduct ourselves among His people.

HUMBLE YOURSELVES UNDER THE MIGHTY HAND

“^{5:6} *Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.*”^{NKJV} The exhortation to be “*clothed with humility*” is now extended. It is not enough to speak in generalities. “*Humbleness of mind*” (Col 3:12) is more than a mere obligation. First, it is wise. Second, it brings us into an area where good things can be expected from God.

Under the Mighty Hand of God. The idea here is that if we do not humble ourselves, God will do it for us. This is His manner, and He is faithful to do as He says. Everyone **will be** humbled. They have opportunity to do it themselves, or God will do it for them. The latter is not a good option, and is fraught with danger. For example, God “*humbled*” Israel in the wilderness, removing all hope of receiving bread except from Him (Deut 8:3). The “*mighty hand of God*” speaks of His Sovereignty and power. When His hand is directed against an individual, no one can “*resist His will*” (Rom 9:19). Such men as Pharaoh (Psa 136:15) and Herod (Acts 12:23) provide us with notable examples of this. Swift judgment was also brought upon Ananias and Sapphira when they did not cloth themselves with humility (Acts 5:1-10). To humble ourselves “*under the mighty hand of God*” is to live with an acute awareness of His presence and will. His hand can be either against us or for us. If it is against us, there is no personality above, in, or below the earth that can protect us. If His hand is for us, there is none that can be effectively against us.

The association of this with our text is arresting! When we do not submit to one another, we are actually rebelling against God, and not humbling ourselves under His mighty hand. When the younger do not submit to the elders, they are refusing to humble themselves under the mighty hand of God. When the sheep do not submit to those who have been given of God to feed them, they are declining to humble themselves under God's all-powerful hand. When “*the elders*” do not feed the flock of God willingly and with an eager spirit, they have rejected the admonition, “*Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.*” This is a poignant text, indeed!

That he May Exalt You. Humility is not an end of itself. It is an appointed means to an end—a tree from which good fruit will be realized. When humility is approached as a mere obligation, it is exceeding difficulty to attain, although it is an obligation. But when the precious promise of God accompanies the exhortation, it makes it more doable, and the saints can joyfully and expectantly enter into humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God.

The Lord has determined to exalt those who humble themselves, and do not need to be humbled by Him. Jesus said, “*And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*” (Matt 23:12). He also provided a vivid example of the exaltation of which He spoke. Our Lord discoursed about a certain Pharisee and a certain publican who prayed. The Pharisee was filled with pride, and thus “*prayed with himself,*” boasting of his disciplined behavior. The publican stood ashamed before God, and confessed his need for mercy. Of that man Jesus said, “*I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted*” (Lk 18:14).

The time of exaltation is coming for every who humbles themselves under the mighty hand of God. The supreme example is seen in the Lord Jesus Christ. He “*humbled Himself*” more than any other man. Consequently, He was “*exalted*” higher than any other. Scripture says like this: “*And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name*” (Phil 2:8-9).

In this, Jesus became the pattern for us all. During our tenure in this world, we have been given a work to do. We have also been given Kingdom men and women who will minister to us. Our humility involves fulfilling our own ministry, and submitting to the ministries God has appointed toward us. In that humility, there is a guarantee of being exalted. It will be public, obvious, personally gratifying, and honoring to God and Christ.

CASTING ALL YOUR CARE UPON HIM

“^{5:7} . . . *casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.*”^{NKJV} Here is an aspect of humility that is most precious. Notice that verses six and seven are a single sentence. Verse seven is nothing less than an enlargement of humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God. When it comes to Kingdom practicality, men are prone to become either too general or too specific, thereby missing the intent of the truth. Notice how the Spirit speaks. He delivers the exhortation in such a manner as to exclude no one. He does not classify our cares, assigning a greater value to some than others. He does not speak of a plurality of cares, but of “*care,*” or “*anxiety*” (NASB,NIV) in the singular.

“**CAST**” **your care.** The word “*casting*” does not denote an action like throwing a net into the sea, or throwing a stone at a target. Rather, it describes making provision for something or someone to be **carried**. This precise word is used one other time in Scripture. That usage provides a vivid illustration of what is meant here. “*And they brought him [the colt] to Jesus: and they cast their garments upon the colt, and they set Jesus thereon*” (Lk 19:35). Thus, the casting of “*care*” upon Jesus is an act of faith, whereby we rely upon Him to carry our “*care,*” managing it and relieving us of its weakening effects. In casting care upon the Lord, we confess to our inability to resolve life’s concerns. By that act, we also confirm our trust in Him “*with Whom we have to do*” (Heb 4:13).

Cast your “CARE.” Some versions use the word “*anxiety.*” Other more broad translations read “*troubles,*”^{BBE} “*worries and cares,*”^{NLT} and “*burden.*”^{NJB} On one occasion, Paul said he bore up under “*the care [same word] of all the churches*” that came upon him “*daily*” (2 Cor 11:28). How does this harmonize with our text, which admonishes us to throw our “*care*” upon the Lord? Very simply! The care came on Paul daily, but it did not end with Him. He did, in fact, throw it upon the

Lord. This is evidenced by his many prayers for the churches (Rom 1:9; Eph 1:16-20; 3:14-19; Phil 1:9; Col 1:9-11; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Tim 1:3; Phile 4).

Care is distracting concern or trouble. It is anxiety, worry, or distress that pulls the heart away from the Lord, and tries to open the door for the entrance of “*an evil heart of unbelief*” (Heb 3:12). The emphasis in the word “*care*” is DISTRACTION. Such care can range from undue concern about food and clothing, to fretting about the condition of the churches. “*Care*” is like a spiritual whirlpool that pulls us down to an earthly view of things. It tempts us to conduct our lives as though everything depended upon us and nothing depended upon God. “*Care*” can descend upon the heart in a moment of time, transforming our entire personality, causing us to make foolish statements and hasty decisions. It is one of Satan’s principle “*fiery darts*,” and is constantly employed by him to turn us “*away from the faith*” (Acts 13:8).

What a wide range of matters is covered in “*care*.” Food, clothing, housing, resources, children, spouses, business, careers, government, social trends, enemies, appearance, popularity, etc., etc. Because of this vast variety, such things are called “*cares*.” They compete with the Word of God, and will choke it out if they are entertained (Mk 4:19). From the standpoint of our text, they are “*care*”—singular, because of this single common characteristic: **they are distracting!** In faith, we must relinquish such care to Jesus!

Cast Your Care KNOWING. We do not simply abandon our “*care*” as though it were an imagination, and there was nothing about which to be concerned. The “*care*” itself is very real, and is justified. **There are legitimate concerns, but we are not to bear the burden of them!** Faith tells us the Lord has a genuine concern for us: He “*cares for you*.” Although the same English word is used, it has a different meaning. Here it means the Lord has a genuine interest in and concern for **US**. Not only that, He is fully capable of addressing all matters that concern us. It is infinitely better to settle it in your heart that the Savior cares for **YOU**, than to be pulled away from Him by a concern for things and circumstances. In Christ, God is determined to “*do good*” to His people, and “*bless*” them (Jer 29:11; Acts 3:28). This is no idle word: “*God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose*”^{NASB} (Rom 8:28). When we are convinced of this, we will “*cast all*” our “*care upon Him!*”

LESSON #41

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{5:8} Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: ⁹ whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9 ^{KJV})

INTRODUCTION

There are complicating factors in the life of a believer. Two of them will suffice to set the stage for this lesson. First, living by faith, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, are accomplished in a hostile realm—*“the present evil world.”* Second, it is done while hounded by a cruel and crafty adversary. It is this latter condition that is now addressed by the Spirit. Much, if not all, failure among believers occurs when the awareness of an adversary is lost. In our time and country, there has been an accentuation of the capability of the natural man, and little or no stress placed upon the Sovereignty and power of God. The results have been disastrous. When the emphasis is put upon human capabilities, the door is opened for the wicked one, and he will **always** enter it. His strength and corrupted genius towers above that of mortals. When they do not give heed to arming themselves against him, he becomes invincible, and can only be hindered by God Himself.

SOBRIETY AND VIGILANCE

“^{5:8a} Be sober, be vigilant . . . ”^{KJV} The nature of spiritual life demands that a certain mind-set be maintained. We are not only faced with challenges to improve, grow, and make spiritual advance, there are also inhibiting factors and aggressive hostility to be confronted. The words now placed before us by the Holy Spirit accent the necessity of being focused, serious, and undistracted in our progress to glory. **Let it be clear, where these exhorted qualities are found, Divine support will be realized.** Every heavenly exhortation is accompanied with the guarantee of assistance and strength.

BE SOBER! This is the third time “*sober*” has been mentioned in this Epistle. First, we were exhorted “*Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end . . .*” (1:13). Second, the Spirit admonished “*But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober*” (4:7). In both of these, the conclusion of all things—“*the end*”—is the incentive for sobriety. We do not know how long the interim between “*now*” and “*then*” will be. That is the reason for being sober. Because of its relative rarity, it will be good to again review this indispensable quality. Remember that the exhortation to “*be sober*” is itself proof of its necessity.

The word “*sober*” includes the following characteristics: self-controlled, watchful, clear headed, alert, serious, and aware of what is going on. Being “*sober*” is the opposite of being “*asleep*” and insensitive to ones surroundings. As it is written, “*Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation*” (1 Thess 5:6-8). These words confirm our real situation in this world.

Sobriety is more than an activity of the mind. It is associated with action—i.e., putting on the protective armor God has supplied. Anything that so distracts the human spirit that the danger of our situation is no longer seen, is an enemy, causing us to lack sobriety. This is an intensely personal matter in which one person cannot legislate to another. But we can fervently admonish one another to be “*sober*,” alert, watchful, and keenly aware of what is going on around us. This is a spiritual alertness.

In this particular text “*sober*” accents watchfulness. We are in a vulnerable situation, an unfriendly world, in a frail vessel, and the target of an angry enemy. If we have eyes to see, we will see these things from afar, and thus avoid the danger associated with them.

BE VIGILANT. The meaning of vigilance is closely related to that of being sober. It means to be watchful by keeping awake. It presumes the temptation of weariness and the tendency to fall asleep. It is as though the Spirit said, “Be sober, and **stay awake!**” Other versions read, “*be watchful,*”^{NKJV} “*be on the alert,*”^{NASB} and “*keep alert.*”^{NRSV} This is the same word Jesus used, when finding His disciples asleep in Gethsemane. “*What, could ye not **watch** with me one hour?*” (Matt 26:40). I do not doubt He often speaks to our hearts in the same manner, as we succumb to spiritual slumber.

The perilous nature of our times is found in the enormous amount of distractions that are hurled at us. Entertainment heads the list in prominence, and is exploding exponentially. From athletics and games to TV and movies, people are being lulled to sleep, and brought to live in a fictitious world. This attitude has even penetrated the church, and is found in its culture, programs, structures, and even its member’s attire. There is little awareness of the dangers that surround them. “*Vigilance*” is considered an obsolete word, and few have even the remotest idea of its significance and necessity.

In such a circumstance, the admonition of our text becomes even more critical. Our spiritual vision must be keen, and our spirits alert. We must be able to look beyond external circumstances, and perceive the stumbling blocks and distractions that are being thrown at us. The time is short, which makes Satan even more dangerous (Rev 12:12).

Our gatherings must sharpen our spiritual vision, intensify our alertness, and help us to be more awake than ever before. Our words and manners, our attentiveness and contributions must be of assistance in this matter of being sober and vigilant. When this happens, the Holy Spirit will use our various ministrations to enliven and strengthen us. Jesus Himself will be among us to minister. Such assemblies no doubt summon bands of holy angels, who are devoted to the support of God’s people. “***Be sober! Be vigilant!***”

THE REASON FOR SOBRIETY AND VIGILANCE

“^{5:8b} . . . ***because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.***”^{KJV} We are not admonished to be sober and vigilant without cause. It is not enough to merely respond to the exhortation to sobriety and vigilance out of a sense of obligation, although that may very well be a beginning point for some. However, obedience that does not perceive the **reason** for obeying will be short-lived. At some point, the human spirit must see the reason for responding to God, else the response will soon wither and eventually die. This is the rationale behind the informative nature of all of the Epistles. They are opening up the reason for obeying, responding to, and following Christ. There is strong justification for giving heed to Divine admonitions.

The reason for being sober and vigilant is straightforward: it is “**BECAUSE**” we have an “*adversary.*” This is not an adversary as encountered in an athletic event. This is a life and death matter—like David and Goliath. Our situation will not allow for external peace to become the occasion for spiritual sloth. Peaceful circumstance, a lull in the deafening noise of distraction, and seasons of blessing, do not change the situation described in this verse. In all of them, Satan is still our adversary, he is still prowling about, and he is still seeking someone to devour.

First, apart from the Word of God, there is absolutely no confirmation of the described circumstance. If God had not told us the saints have such an antagonist, there is no possible way we could have come to this conclusion. Even after we have been solemnly warned, many Christians are

conducting themselves as though this was not true. They live as though they had no adversary, or personal attacks from him.

We have an unseen opponent: an enemy that is against us, and aggressively so. He stalks us like a “*roaring lion*,” about to pounce on its prey. HE is identified as a “*lion*” because of his strength and shrewdness. He is said to be “*roaring*” because of his rage, malice, and brutality. Do not imagine that “*as a roaring lion*” means Satan is harmless and helpless! Job will instruct you more perfectly in the matter, as well as Peter. They can both tell you what “*your adversary*” can do if ever given permission to test or sift you! There is no need to be “*sober*” and “*vigilant*” if Satan is just a blustering old lion who is no threat to us. Such a solemn warning should remove the inclination for men to think so foolishly.

Satan is “*walking about*,” or “*prowls about*.”^{NASB} He is going up and down and throughout the whole world, seeking for those who are not sober and not vigilant. **Twice**, in the days of Job, when God asked Satan “*From where do you come?*”, the devil answered, “*From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it*” (Job 1:7; 2:2). He was roaming the whole world, prowling about just as our text says he does now. There is no section of this world in which he is not “*walking about*.” There is no time when he ceases to prowl, stalking benighted and sleepy souls, and even those who are sober and vigilant. When you are awake, “*your adversary*” is walking about. When you are asleep, “*your adversary*” is waking about. That is why you must “*be sober*,” and “*be vigilant*.”

And what is our adversary seeking to do? Why is he prowling like a roaring lion, with his mouth wide open? He is “*looking for someone to devour!*”^{NRSV} – someone to “*swallow up*.”^{YLT} He is contemplating the destruction of unalert souls. He wants to bring them down, cause them to fall, provoke them to deny the faith, or be overtaken in a fault. When you see poor souls that fall, it is because they were vulnerable to the wicked one, who is seeking someone to devour! That is why men and women stupidly fall into gross and unreasonable sins! The devil found them without soberness and vigilance, and thus “*devoured*” them. The Spirit has spoken frankly with us about this matter, and we do well to hear what He says.

It is no wonder Jesus taught us to pray, “*And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one*”^{NKJV} (Matt 6:13). Every insightful person wants to be protected from the “*adversary*.” Those with understanding know, that on their own, they are not equal to his attacks. Job can testify to the hardness of trial. Peter can declare the difficulty of being sifted. Paul can instruct us of the effects of a thorn delivered by Satan. How aggressive our prayers ought to be in this area! Mark it well, such fervent prayers WILL be heard if they are accompanied by sobriety and vigilance. Being sober and vigilant is essential. They are made effective when they are accompanied by “*all prayer*.”

HOW TO RESIST THE DEVIL

“^{5:9}***Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.***”^{KJV} Notice, our adversary does not simply go away, nor is there a promise of not having to confront him. Whether or not we will encounter him is not the question. Rather, it is whether or not we will **resist** him.

To “*resist*” the devil is not turning our back on him, or pretending he is not there. To “*resist*” means to oppose or stand against. Other versions read “*whom withstand*,”^{ASV} “*Do not give way to him*,”^{BBE} “*Take a firm stand against him*,”^{NLT} and “*Stand up to him*.”^{NJB} This is a combative stance in which we refuse to back up or allow Satan to attack us without fighting back. In resisting the devil, we refuse to yield to his temptations. We set ourselves against him and oppose, fight against, and do combat with him. Resisting is aggressive and determined. It involves insight and boldness,

and a refusal to give up what Christ has brought to us. This is no work for the timorous of heart, or those without understanding.

How do we “*resist*” the devil? At this point we rise above the reasoning of men and the manner of flesh. We actually do combat with Satan **indirectly**. In a sense, we are face to face with him, but in another sense we are not. In the first sense, we are actually confronting the devil in a very personal way. In the second sense, there is something between us that neutralizes the entire circumstance. Satan does not have immediate access to us, but is limited by the will and power of our Lord. Too, we are doing battle with him in Christ Jesus, and not person-to-person.

Steadfast in the faith. Our resistance takes place when we are “*steadfast in the faith.*” This is continuing to have a dominating faith. It is enduring in believing, and refusing to have our eyes pulled into the dark domain of Satan, thus seeing things from an earthly point of view. To be steadfast is to be **firm**. It is to be **strong and unwavering**. It is to be **solid and stable** in trusting the Lord and believing His promises.

Steadfastness in the faith is the same as holding up the “*shield of faith*” (Eph 6:16). It is the same as gaining the victory over the world through faith (1 John 5:4). Satan has no counterattack for faith. Your faith is to Satan what unbelief is to God: it moves him away from you. This is another way of saying Satan’s attacks can actually cause you to believe God the more, to trust Him more fully, and to see the promises as more precious. That is the secret to opposing Satan. That is how you do battle against him. When you believe God, you throw down the lies of the devil. When you trust God, you throw up an impenetrable barrier between you and “*your adversary.*” Just as unbelief hinders Jesus (Matt 13:58), so faith stifles the attacks of the wicked one.

Our brethren. Our opposition to Satan is to be accompanied by a recollection of our “*brethren that are in the world.*” Steadfastness in the faith is conducive to this remembrance. **Believing God cannot be done without considering His people.** And what is it that we are to recall about this holy society? It is that “*the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished*” by them.^{NASB} You are not the only one confronting the devil. Remember, he is walking to and fro, and up and down in the world. And, notice what it says about confronting our adversary. It is called “*afflictions,*” or “*sufferings.*” **From the military point of view, we are resisting. From the experiential point of view, we are suffering.** Think of it this way. When you are suffering, you are also fighting—that is the other side of the coin. This is the way we are being better suited for glory (2 Tim 2:12).

Accomplishment. These sufferings, or confrontations with our adversary, are also accomplishments. Something is being achieved through them. The word “*accomplished*” is a strong one, indicating the completion or finishing of a work. These are small remnants of Christ’s sufferings, “*left behind*” to be filled up, or experienced, by us (Col 1:24). In them, we are made stronger, better, and wiser. We are made to see the real issues more clearly. In them heaven becomes more precious, and the world is less desired. A work is being accomplished in you when you face the devil—but that is certainly not his intent. His purposes are being overturned when you are perfected in your sufferings! This takes place, praise the Lord, only in those who are “*in the world.*” As soon as we leave this domain, there will be no confrontations with the devil, and no need for resistance.

LESSON #42

A series of lessons, by Given O. Blakely

“^{5:10} But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. ¹¹ To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. ¹² By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. ¹³ The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son. ¹⁴ Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.” (1 Pet 5:8-9 KJV)

INTRODUCTION

In Scripture, beginnings and endings are always significant. With unwavering consistency, inspired writers leave their writers contemplating heavenly realities. They begin in the heavenly places, communicate their message from there, and conclude by leaving us looking forward to glory. This is the manner of the Kingdom of Christ, and those who minister in His name do well to follow their example. Peter now casts the mantle of clarity upon his writings, confirming that believers are in the hands of God. He assures them of the Lord's gracious intentions in salvation. In Christ they have been called to better things. God is stripping from them all that cannot enter glory, and is perfecting them for their reign with Christ. What they have received and are enjoying from heaven is real. It is no cunningly devised fable, or mere emotional experience. The gracious manner in which the Apostle writes is characteristic of a true shepherd who cares for and nourishes the sheep. Peter has done what Jesus told him to do: feed the sheep.

THE WORKING OF GOD

“^{5:10} But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”^{KJV} The first word of this sentence is important: *“But!”* He has just finished reminding us of our adversary the devil, and of his wicked intentions. We are to set ourselves to resist him by steadfastness in the faith. But Peter will not leave us contemplating our enemy. He introduces the triumph-factor: *“But God!”* (v 8-9). In this expression he is telling us God is accomplishing His will in the midst of our conflict with the wicked one. The devil is seeking to devour us, but look what God is going! This is an intercessory prayer, uttered to God, and written for the consolation of the saints.

GOD OF ALL GRACE. In this expression, the Spirit traces all true benefits back to a beneficent God. It is similar to saying *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights”* (James 1:17). Also, the idea of limitlessness is conveyed. Believers are a situation where grace is abundant and exhaustless. There is no extent to which God will not go to bless those who believe in His Son. He will withhold no good thing from them. As it is written, *“no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly”* (Psa 84:11).

CALLED TO HIS ETERNAL GLORY. Because there are *“many gods”* (1 Cor 8:5), the true God is identified. It is the One who has called us to participate in HIS *“eternal glory.”* This parallels with the Spirit's words, *“whom He justified, them He also glorified”* (Rom 8:30). This is the glory into which we are being changed, from one stage to another (2 Cor 3:18). Any form of religion that comes short of this is spurious and worthless.

AFTER YOU HAVE SUFFERED A WHILE. The way to our appointed reign is through the crucible of suffering. Only *“If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him”* (2 Tim 2:12). Our suffering, however, is only for *“a while.”* From the standpoint of faith, it is *“but for a moment”* (2 Cor 4:17). The duration of our hardship is not known to us, but it is to God. It will not extend one second

beyond the point where it is of eternal benefit. Our “*times*” and our sufferings are in the hands of our gracious God (Psa 31:1; 1 Cor 10:13). We are “*appointed*” to our afflictions (1 Thess 3:3), and they are strictly governed.

MAKE YOU PERFECT. Our sufferings do not “*perfect*” us automatically. God Himself MAKES us “*perfect*” by means of them. Here perfection means to complete the preparation for an appointed role and place. Elsewhere it is called “*finish the work*” (Rom 9:28), or completing the work He has begun in us “*until the day of Jesus Christ*” (Phil 1:6). In the sense of this text, we will be perfected when we are ready to leave this world.

STABLISH YOU. To be established is to be made firm, reliable, and stable. It is to cease to be tossed to and fro by the circumstances of life and the doctrines of men. This is something God Himself does “*after*” we have “*suffered a while.*” Working through our faith and in His grace, the Lord brings us to a point where we are “*no more children.*” Life does not jostle us as it once did, and we are able to “*stand in the evil day.*” Surely, God “*is of power to stablish you*” (Rom 16:25). This is having “*root*” in ourselves (Mk 4:17).

STRENGTHEN YOU. Being established is being firmly fixed or anchored in the appointed place. “*Strength*” has to do with personal solidity and integrity. It is being able to extend ourselves in the wilderness-journey of life without giving up. It is spiritual stamina, where we do not become “*weary in well doing*” (Gal 6:9). To be strengthened is to recover from spiritual fatigue (Isa 41:10). It is to be made equal to the battles of life and the challenges of the wicked one (Eph 6:10). Strength results in refusing to yield to the temptations of the wicked one, and declining to “*quit*” (1 Cor 16:13).

SETTLE YOU. To be settled is to be stable and grounded. It speaks of an aspect of spiritual life that is slightly different from being made perfect, established, and strengthened. Settling has to do with being firmly planted on the appointed foundation—blended, as it were, with that foundation. This is the process of reference in Ephesians 2:20-21. “*And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.*” That is being settled, and is the work of God!

THE PURPOSE AND SURENESS OF IT ALL

“^{5:11} *To Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*”^{KJV} One of the great lessons to be learned is that salvation is primarily for the honor and glory of God. It is a glorious enterprise in which holy angels are tutored in the magnificent wisdom of God (Eph 3:10). All of heaven stands in amazement at the working of God in salvation. This is emphasized again and again in the Revelation. “. . . *those beasts give glory and honor and thanks to Him that sat on the throne . . . Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power . . . Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever . . . Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever . . . Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God*” (4:9,11; 5:13; 7:12; 19:12). The supremacy of faith is seen in the fact that it gives “*glory to God*” (Rom 4:20). When Christ “*received us*” from the hand of the Father, it was “*to the glory of God*” (Rom 15:2). The modern church has placed a disproportionate emphasis on helping people, and too little upon glorifying God. The real purpose of the salvation of God has nearly been obliterated by the institutionalized church.

GLORY. Technically, “*glory*” involves **the honor, praise, dignity, and the worship of God.** In salvation, all of this is rendered out of an understanding and thankful heart. God received glory upon the head of Pharaoh (Rom 9:17), Sennacherib (2 Chron 32:22), and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan

4:36-37). While such glory is involved in the walk of faith, that is not the type of glory in our text. This is not a text of admonition, nor is it a statement of doctrine—although both are found elsewhere in Scripture. This is an outbreak of praise—of insightful thanksgiving. Peter, who himself was suffering because of his faith, had seen the hand of the Lord in it all. He knew it was God who was working in him “*both to will and to do of His own good pleasure*” (Phil 2:12). He has so taught the disciples as to allow them to share in such insight.

There is a special honor brought to the Lord when His people perceive who He is and what He is doing—when they recognize “*It is the Lord!*” (1 Sam 3:18; John 21:7). This is part of God’s will being done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). Heaven knows “*the whole earth is full of His glory*” (Isa 6:3). But when that is perceived among the elect, a magnificent and transcendent glory is brought to God. When His hand and work are perceived, and due honor is given to Him, the “*glory*” of our text will occur.

DOMINION. Here is an aspect of our great God that has been greatly obscured by academic approaches to Scripture. Flesh refuses to think of God in connection with “*dominion.*” It had rather shine the light of attention upon men, their free will, and their ability. But there is no room for such emphases in the Kingdom of God. That is why they are totally absent in the sacred record. “*Dominion*” has to do with God’s **Sovereignty, might, control, and supremacy.** He is, in fact, “*greater than all*” (John 10:29). Those who oppose Him will be summarily cast down. Those who believe Him will be upheld. His enemies will all be put under His feet, and His children will all be exalted to sit with His Son in His throne. If men do not acknowledge Him, He is fully able to reduce them to a place where they will be prone to give Him honor, as with Nebuchadnezzar. He can stop Pharaoh from doing his wicked will, and cause young David to defeat mighty Goliath. God HAS the dominion! It belongs to Him. It is not that He ought to have it, but that He DOES have it. Further, He can give power in any degree to whomever He desires (Dan 4:25,32). Blessed is the person who knows and confesses this.

The church needs to hear of a Sovereign, or all powerful, God. “*But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased*” (Psa 115:3). And again, “*Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places*” (Psa 135:6). This is a truth the people of God must grasp with both hands, else they will not be able to stand “*against the wiles of the devil.*” True praise will ascribe “*all power*” to God. It will acknowledge that “*dominion*” belongs to Him. Faith will take that truth and live triumphantly in a hostile world, bringing honor to God.

FINAL THOUGHTS

“^{5:12-14} *By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand. The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son. Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.*”^{KJV} There is a very personal aspect to life in Christ that must not be overlooked. There is a tendency in flesh to so formalize the truth as to rob it of any heart or spirit. Notice how personal and tender the grace of God moves Peter to speak. It is not a mere formal tone that we hear, but the heart of one who is laboring together with God.

SILVANUS. This name is mentioned three other times in Scripture. In all of them, he was grouped with Paul and Timothy (2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). It is generally understood that *Silvanus* is an alternate name for “*Silas.*” The NIV reads “*Silas,*” providing a footnote stating it is the Greek variant of Silas. The highest tribute is paid to Silvanus, which is to be coveted by every child of God: “*a faithful brother.*” He was dependable, always siding with the Lord and engaging in His work. The words “*I suppose*” do not cast doubt on this description. They rather mean, “*I*

consider, or regard, him to be a faithful brother." ^{NKJV,NASB,NIV} Silvanus has been the scribe of the letter, and will deliver it to the brethren. Here Peter is personally writing a postscript.

WRITTEN BRIEFLY. The letter was "*brief*" in comparison to what could have been shared, and what was on the heart of the Apostle. Literarily, the letter consists of 2,580 words and 116 sentences, but it was "*brief*," or a "*short letter*."^{NRSV} Those with a love for the truth will also consider it brief. Flesh will see it as long and tedious. This letter is appropriately called an exhortation and a testimony ("*exhorting and testifying*"). It is a call to involvement from one who himself was working together with the Lord.

THE TRUE GRACE OF GOD. The CAUSE of the endurance of the faithful is identified as "*the true grace of God*"—the real thing. It is interesting to note that Peter does not resort to an academic definition of grace, but to the working of grace. He thus speaks to the faith of his readers. They were to trace their stability back to God's grace, or love and favor. Real grace is effective, and is not merely theoretical. This is the grace made known through the Gospel (Acts 20:24). I find it disconcerting that so much talk about the grace of God has little to do with the actual experience of standing firm in the midst of trial—even "*fiery trial*" (1 Pet 4:12). This word—"true grace"—builds confidence.

THE CHURCH AT BABYLON. Some have thought Peter was ascribing the name "*Babylon*" to Rome, where they suppose he was located at this time. I do not concur with this judgment, for he would not have mentioned the true church in the context of a spiritual Babylon. That, in my judgment, is an admixture. If he was speaking of saints in Rome, he would have mentioned the sanctified "*in Rome*" as Paul did (Rom 1:1). This is the only mention of historic Babylon in the New Testament writings. I understand it to be Babylon in Syria, where many dispersed Jews still resided.

ELECTED WITH YOU. Babylon was foreign geographic territory, indeed. Yet, the church there is said to be "*elected together with you*." Something all believers have in common is God's choice of them "*in Him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love*" (Eph 1:4). That election was implemented through the Gospel, and is evidenced by its reception (1 Thess 1:4).

MARCUS MY SON. This is the same as "*Mark*," and is so translated in the other versions. In the KJV, Paul also refers to him as "*Marcus*," identifying him as a cousin of Barnabas ("*sister's son to Barnabas*," Col 4:12). This was the "*John Mark*" over which Paul and Barnabas disputed and eventually parted (Acts 15:37-40). This text indicates he was begotten in the Gospel through Peter, and was presently with the Apostle in Babylon.

GREET ONE ANOTHER. A "*kiss of charity*" was common among early believers (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). The Eastern manner was for all to greet each other with a kiss. Brethren, however, were worthy of a special greeting, and still are.

PEACE BE WITH YOU. The Apostle begins and ends his letter with peace (1:2). This is to be a pervasive quality among the saints at all times. It is the environment of growth.