

TODAY

G.R. Crow



Grace Ministries

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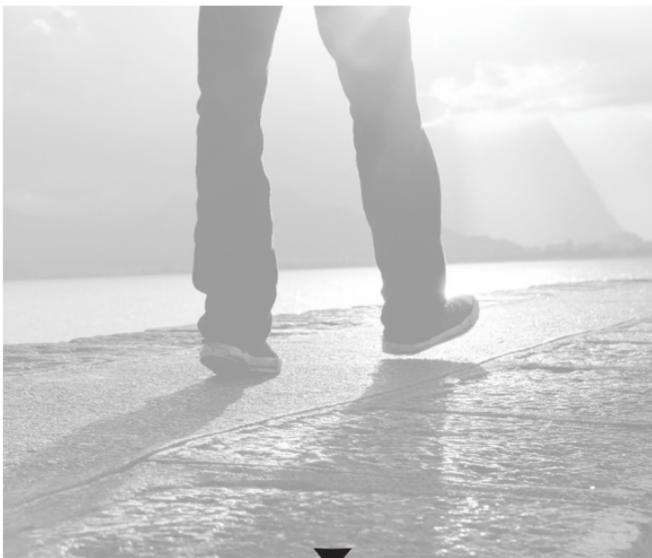
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TODAY

AN EXERCISE OF FAITH

If believers in Christ would take time each morning to come into the presence of God and remind themselves of the glorious truths given below, it could be of much benefit. I do not mean this should be practiced as a mere ritual, a mere reading of words with-

out thought, something to be gotten through as quickly as possible. These are truths that must enter deeply into our minds and our experience, and produce obedience. We should meditate on them, and look up to God that He would enable us to know the reality of them in our daily lives.

Remember the words of the Lord - "If you continue in my Word then you are disciples indeed, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" - John 8:32

And remember what David wrote in Psalm 1:1-3.

Today I continue to believe that God's compassions never fail, that they are new this morning, that God's faithfulness is great- Lamentations 3:23

Today I recognize again that God the creator of the universe is my Father and I am His child - *But as many as received him, to those who believed in his name, to them he gave the right to become the sons of God. John 1:12; See what kind of love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the sons of*

God. Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know him. 1 John 3:1.

Today I am forgiven and justified and have peace with God. I am clothed with the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ in which there is no flaw, no stain. All my sins, terrible though they have been, are blotted out by His blood and will never be counted against me – *He has not dealt with us according to our sins, or repaid us according to our evil deeds. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far he has removed our transgressions from us. Like a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear him. Psalm 103:10-12; “I have blotted out your transgressions like a thick cloud, and your sins like a cloud. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.” Isaiah 44:22; “Who is a God like you, who pardons wickedness, and passes over the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in mercy. Once more he will have compassion on us. He will subdue our wicked deeds. And you will cast all their*

sins into the depths of the sea. Micah 7:18,19; “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not count against him. ...Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 4:7,8; 5:1; But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:7-9.

Today I am united with Christ, and so I am a member of His body, the great worldwide church of which He alone is the Head and Savior. He lives in me and I in Him, and so I am dead to sin and alive toward God – John 17:21-23; Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:27; 3:3; Romans 6:3-8. I count I so (Romans 6:11), and in the name of the Lord Jesus I resist the devil who would try to obscure or deny this truth and all truth and draw me back under the power of sin

– *You are of your father the devil, and you want to fulfill the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and did not remain in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar, and the father of lies. John 8:44; Therefore submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. James 4:7; Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that these same sufferings are being imposed on your brethren that are in the world. 1 Peter 5:8,9.*

Today I would forget those things which are behind, and by God's grace press on in faith toward the goal for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus – Philipians 3:13,14.

Today I deny myself, take up my cross and follow Christ – Luke 9:23. Once again I present myself to Him as a daily offering and sacrifice for Him alone, and I believe that what I offer to Him He accepts – *Leviticus 1:3-*

17; 6:12; Numbers 28:3-8; Therefore, brethren, because of the mercies of God, I plead with you to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Romans 12:1.

Today I recognize again that God's throne is a throne of grace – Hebrews 4:16. I will let no feelings of guilt about confessed and forsaken sin, no remembrance of past failure, no awareness of my old fallen nature keep me from Him.

Today through the blood of Jesus, the great High Priest whom God has appointed for us, I draw near in the Most Holy Place and know that He draws near to me - *Therefore, brothers, we have boldness to enter into the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way that he has consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and we have a high priest over the house of God. So let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Hebrews 10:19-22; Draw near to God,*

and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. James 4:8.

Today once again by faith I receive into my innermost being the fullness of God's Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and believe that He (who can make the weak strong and the incapable capable) will enable me to trust Him as I ought and live for Him as I ought and serve Him as I ought.

Today I remember again the requests the Lord Himself told us to make in Matthew 6:9-13 where He used the words "this day" and "daily".

Today I know that I am in the loving care of the all-wise, all-powerful God, so I will not allow myself to fret, sink into anxiety, or worry about anything – Matthew 6:25,33,34; Philippians 4:6. He will provide for all my personal needs and the needs that arise in my service for Him. I resist any temptation to give in to discouraging or depressing thoughts or gloomy feelings (Psalm 42:11), and resolve to keep my eyes on Him who is in charge of

all things relating to my life and service, and who continues to work all things for my good - *looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:2; And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28.*

Today I wait at wisdom's door to hear His voice (Proverbs 8:34), to know His holy and perfect will for me for today and for the time to come (Romans 12:2; Colossians 1:9), and I trust Him to guide me in His truth and teach me (Psalm 25:5).

Today I purpose to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, to be clothed with His whole armor, to use the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith (Ephesians 1:19,20; 6:10-17; Colossians 1:11), and to gain the victory over anything that might come against me - *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Romans 8:37; Now thanks be*

to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and spreads everywhere the aroma of his knowledge through us. 2 Corinthians 2:14.

Today it is my heart's desire to live a life of prayer and so fulfill Ephesians 6:18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17.

Today I would praise, thank, believe, obey, love serve and glorify God in accordance with these Scriptures – *Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous; for praise is fitting for the upright. Psalm 33:1; In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:18; Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. Proverbs 3:5; And Jesus in answer said to them, "Have faith in God. Mark 11:22; And Samuel said, "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Look, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen is better than the fat of rams. 1 Samuel 15:22; Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves as slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey,*

whether slaves of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? Romans 6:16; Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. Matthew 22:37; And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him. Our love is made perfect in this: That we can have boldness in the day of judgment, because in this world we are just as he is. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear is linked with torment. He who fears is not made perfect in love. We love him, because he first loved us. If a man says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar. For he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And we have this command from him: He who loves God must love his brother also. 1 John 4:16-21; If anyone serves me, he must follow me, and where I am, there my servant will also be. If anyone serves me, my Father will honour him. John 12:26; Therefore, my dear brethren, be firm, unmovable, always abounding in the work of

the Lord, for you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord; Therefore, whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all for the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 15:58; 10:31.

Today my aim, my heart's desire is to know the reality of Ephesians 3:16-19 in daily experience.

Today once again I acknowledge that only God's strength, grace, and presence can enable me to do or experience any of the above and overcome my weakness, and selfishness, my unbelief, pride and depravity. And trusting Him, not my feelings, experiences, or circumstances, I go forward one moment at a time, one day at a time, to live this day the life of faith for His glory, a life worthy of the Lord and pleasing to Him in every way – so that you might behave in a manner worthy of the Lord and please Him in everything, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:10.

Help , Lord! I am all weakness, sinfulness and weariness – you are my hope, my only one – Isaiah 40:29-31; Psalm 33:20; 146:5; Colossians 1:27. Enable me this day to guard

my eyes, my desires, my thoughts, my heart,
and to have the word of Christ richly living in
me and governing all my behavior.

Today I resolve to pray for others (1 Timothy 2:1-4), and for God's work and His servants (not forgetting Matthew 9:38), and to think of how to do good to others today.



CHARGE

*“Jesus said to him [the devil]
‘Away from me, Satan! For it is
written: ‘Worship the Lord your
God, and serve Him only”*

Matthew 4:10

This is one of the greatest commands of the whole Bible. We who believe in Christ must serve Him or be disobedient. This does not mean that every single believer has to become a pastor or an evangelist or a missionary. But it does mean that every believer must accept the lordship of Christ and refuse anything else or anyone else who would try to control our lives.

This command Jesus quoted is a simple command and easy to understand. But you will find that it is not so easy to obey. There are very powerful forces in the world that will try to keep us from obeying it. And there is the great power of sin in our nature that will not and cannot obey it and which will constantly try to trip us up and make us fall. And there is Satan himself who will oppose us and fight us and use all his great intelligence and all his clever ways to see that we do not obey the Lord Jesus Christ's command. In few words, the three strong enemies of our spiritual life will all be at war with us. I mean, the fallen world, the fallen angel, the devil, and the fallen nature in us.

See here, in the verses I read, that the devil attacked even the Lord Jesus Himself on this very point, hoping to bring Him down. Do you think he will not attack us about this? We should not be so foolish as to think so.

Every person on earth serves someone or something. Freedom is an illusion. Those who try to cast off all restraint (like the prodigal son in Luke 15) and be free to do what they please, these people are the most enslaved. In John 8:34 Jesus said – the one who sins is a slave of sin. Since everyone on earth has sinned everyone has been a slave of sin and will continue to be so until changed by Christ.

Jesus also said – John 8:36 – “If the Son sets you free you will be free indeed” Free from what? The consequences of sin. Free to what? To serve Him. If He makes us free we will even be free **not** to serve him, but then, we will only want to Christ our Lord. We will love Him because He has set us free and our service will be glad and willing. And Jesus wants to set us free from any power or person or force or influence that would keep us from serving Him. When we are free in

our hearts we will inevitably serve Him freely and gladly.

So Jesus insisted that people must serve the true God only, God alone, God forever. He knew that people in general serve other things, other gods. The Bible speaks of these...

I prefer to speak of other kinds of gods and idols people serve – not those represented by physical idols, but those in the heart, with no form or shape but with tremendous power. It is because of these idols in the heart that men make physical idols. And these heart idols lurk in your fallen nature struggling to make you serve them. If you don't think so, you are wrong. You haven't yet learned what your fallen nature is like.

There is a very common god of people around the world – lord religion. Multitudes of people serve that, not God... They are in bondage just as real as any slave is in bondage to his master. They do what their religion tells them to do, without thinking, without objecting, without exploring other possibilities. I wish I had time to speak of this but

I don't, so I will go on to other gods of men.

Paul speaks of one of these in Rom 16:17,18. He spoke of it again in Phil 3:19 (read). So for some Christians their belly is their lord and god. They want the satisfaction of their appetites. They want to have plenty and not have to worry about food or any other of the good things of life. So when lord belly gives an order they hurry to obey. They are not much concerned about eternal rewards, they want satisfaction now. In the Bible there is a sad example of this service of the belly – Esau in Genesis 25.

Lord belly has a partner – Lord lust – and he is a very powerful god indeed. King Saul killed his thousands and David his tens of thousands but lust has killed multiplied millions and keeps the great majority on earth in its service. By lust I mean wrong sexual desire. This powerful lord of some people says “go wallow in the gutter” and its subjects say “which gutter today, lord?” And lust says, “Any gutter will do. Just defy God, ignore His word, stifle conscience, act like a fool, and bring great danger of disgrace or disease or death on yourself”. And lust’s

servants humbly say “yes, lord.”

For 50 years I have been a servant of God in India and I have seen many Christian leaders fall before this mighty power of lust and ruin their ministry. Don't be one of them. Do what Paul said, “Flee from youthful lusts.”

Here is another idol in the heart that people serve – Lord pride. He has a twin brother – lord arrogance. These say to their slaves: “Don't bow your neck to anyone either in heaven or on earth. Don't be weak and meek and humble – that's the way for people to run over you. Be strong, be great, and be proud of what you are and what you can do. Be proud of your color, your caste, your property, and your good looks. Look down on the poor and humble. They can't do you any good. Be somebody. Be big. Get power over others.” And their poor foolish slaves, unwilling to bow their necks to the true and only God, bow to lord pride and agree to give their lives to it. They love the honors of men and to be exalted in peoples' eyes.

Now I point out an exceedingly powerful

god and few escape its service. I mean lord money. Money says to its servants “Jump” and they ask “how far, lord?” Lord money says, “You can serve me and serve God at the same time. No problem. Of course, I will sometimes ask you to tell some lies, and use a little deceit, and falsify some records, and take advantage of others to get a good deal. But don’t worry about these things. Think of the end result – lots of money in the bank, houses, properties, lands. Go on out there and get on the job.” And money’s slaves, forgetting what Jesus said about this, say, “Great. I see wonderful possibilities here. And best of all I don’t have to give up my Christianity. I can be a good church member or a Christian leader and still use all means to make a lot of money.”

And what did Jesus say? You cannot serve two masters. You cannot serve God and mammon – money. So, if you have any sense at all, you will not try to do that. Those who serve money think money is serving them, but they are wrong. They are the slaves. I plead with all of you – be very careful with money. Don’t let your heart get tak-

en away by it. If you do, there will be great loss. From what I have seen in India lust has ruined many Christians, but money has ruined far more. Friends, escape for your life from this dark lord.

Well, I can't speak of all the gods men serve in their hearts. Just two more. Lord self – to most people he is the supreme god and all the other gods serve this one. He teaches his slaves – do all for self and nearly everyone in the world serves him... He is supreme – well, almost supreme, for there is another behind and above him.

Satan is the god of this world and his servants serve him by serving all these other gods. By serving lust you serve him. By serving pride you serve him. By serving money you serve him. Satan becomes our Master. He owns our souls. Tragic results.

Believers have always been engaged in an important war – against the terrorism of idols in the heart, against anything that exalts itself against Christ, against anything that would have us serve it and not Him, that would try to take our affection our devo-

tion our love our service away from Him. Do you want to win this war? You must be a good soldier and be equipped with the armor and arms He give us.

What do we get if we are victors in this battle against things that would enslave us and truly serve Him? If anyone serves me, him will my Father honor. Yes, honor, and rewards beyond your imagination, treasures beyond counting, eternally there for you in God's control.

What do we get if we will not serve Him? You may get many things in this world, popularity, or wealth or comforts and luxuries, and the praise of men etc., but in the end – grief and tears, bitterness, death, terrible loss. Yes, I have seen it many times.

We will die one day or the Lord will come one day and we will stand before Him and give an account of our service. What we served and why we served what or whom we did, our motives, our aims, our desires – all this will be revealed. Let us have a godly fear, let us make sure that we can stand before our Heavenly Father without shame.

Remember this – The Bible says that we are more than conquerors through Him [Christ] who loves us. We can win the battle against other things that would try to gain our service. We can stand on the battlefield strong, victorious, praising God for the victory over everything Satan can throw at us...

God has given us the power to choose. So Joshua said to the people of Israel in Josh 24:15 – “choose you this day whom you will serve.” When we choose to serve Christ, then, we choose not to serve anything else. He will not share our service with anyone else, with anything else.

If we do not serve? Tears, regrets, terrible loss. If we serve? Rewards beyond imagining. John 12:26.

We can choose to go one way or another. Choose. Choose today. Flee from other gods, these idols in the heart. All of them are destroyers. Choose that Christ alone will be our Lord, He alone will have our hearts that we will be people of integrity, Spirit-filled, fervent to serve Him wherever He wants. Doing whatever He wants.



THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

A strange teaching is being heard in some churches in the land. This teaching is that we may receive the Lord Jesus

Christ as Savior while not receiving Him as Lord. None of the apostles insisted more on the fact that salvation is altogether by the grace of God than Paul, and he is set forth as an example of God's saving grace (1 Timothy 1:16). Yet when he was struck down on the Damascus road, the second thing he said was "What will you have me do, Lord?" Here is immediate submission to the Lordship of Jesus. Paul certainly received the very first time Christ as both Savior and Lord. It was not one time as Lord and at a later time as Savior as some folks believe.

In fact, in that encounter near Damascus, nothing whatever is said of Christ being the Savior.

Jesus is, of course, one magnificent person – the Christ, the son of man, the Son of God, the incarnation of Jehovah God, Savior, Lord and King. When a repenting sinner comes to Him, he (or she) may have had only a little instruction about any of these facts about Him, and one or another of them may be uppermost in his mind (to be saved it is not necessary to know much theology). But he cannot reject any of them

and hope to have a true faith in Christ. To receive this wonderful person surely means to receive Him as He is, and all that He is – though we may know little enough who He is when we receive Him, and will spend the rest of our lives trying to understand all that He is and what it means to fully obey and follow Him.

Paul immediately recognized Jesus as Lord, and so he knew also that Jesus had the right to tell him what to do, and he waited for orders. This is the only way to a true Christian life. Below I give many references that bear out this statement. Please look them up in your Bible and consider the comments I have given below.

Matthew 4:17 – One of the things that every sinner needs to repent of is his or her rebellion against the Lordship of Christ. And how can anyone enter His kingdom without submitting to the King? Likewise He is the Head and Lord of the Church which is His body. How can anyone be baptized by the Holy Spirit into this body – 1 Corinthians 12:12,13 – while still refusing the Lordship of Christ in his heart?

Matthew 7:21 – The will of the Father must involve our submitting to Jesus as Lord – Philippians 2:9-11.

Matthew 16:24-26 – Surely denying oneself and taking up the cross to follow Jesus involves denying one's lordship over self and submitting to Christ as Lord.

Mark 10:17-27 – To the young man who came asking about eternal life Jesus indicated that he had to submit to His authority and set out to obey Him, that real faith would not let anything prevent him from following Christ. And Jesus was speaking about entering the kingdom of God (v 23), and being saved (v 26,27).

Luke 6:46 and Matthew 7:24 – Can we think they are saved people who are foolish enough to ignore or reject Jesus' teachings and build on sand – Matthew 7:26?

Luke 14:26,27,33 – If we are not His disciples (which means those who learn from Him), can we dare to think we know Him as Savior? How could we even know who He is, what salvation is, and how to repent and believe in Him if He does not teach us?

John 1:10-12 – Verses 10,11 present Jesus as the Creator and Lord of the world, and v 12 speaks of receiving Him as such. This fact is often neglected when using v 12.

John 8:24 – Jesus is saying He is the incarnation of Jehovah, the Lord of the universe, and that to be saved the Jews had to receive Him as such.

John 10:4,14,27 – Jesus says that His sheep recognize Him as their shepherd – that is, their Lord and Owner – and they follow Him, which certainly involves obedience. If we do not follow Him we are not His sheep.

John 14:15 – If we do not love Jesus, can we vainly imagine that we are saved people – 1 Corinthians 16:22? If we do love Him we will obey Him – that is, submit to Him as Lord.

Acts 2:36-38 – Peter tells the Jews that they must repent of their rejection of Jesus as Lord and Christ and receive Him as such. Baptism was, and still is, an indication of this. It signifies death to the old

life and being raised to a new life under the Lordship of Christ. People should not be baptized without understanding this.

Acts 5:32 – Can we think we will be saved without the Holy Spirit, or receive the Holy Spirit without submitting to God's Son – Romans 8:9?

Acts 16:31 – The jailer was **not** told to believe in the **Savior** Jesus Christ but in the **Lord** Jesus Christ, and can we think that real faith in Him can be born in the heart that will not submit to Him? And is not believing in Him and receiving Him the same thing, so that they who believe in the Lord receive the Lord – John 1:12?

Romans 1:5 – Observe that once again obedience and faith are linked together. Indeed we cannot have one without the other – 2 Thessalonians 1:8; Romans 6:17. When we believe in Christ, the Holy Spirit gives us a heart that wants to obey Him. And this is a very great gift of grace. ***We are not saved by obedience; we are saved by grace through faith – the kind of grace and faith that begins to make***

us obedient. Any other kind of faith is dead – James 2:14-26.

Romans 6:16-23 – Paul is saying that every person is a slave to what he obeys. If we submit to sin we are sin's servants; if we submit to God we are His servants. The one way leads to death; the other way leads to righteousness and life. Does not obeying the teaching the apostles gave plainly involve the Lordship of Jesus Christ over us? How can we be slaves of God and not recognize Christ as our Lord?

Romans 8:14 – Does not God's Spirit always lead us to submit to the Lordship of Christ? The answer is obvious. And is Paul not saying that only those led by God's Spirit are saved people?

Romans 10:9 – Can we think of confessing Jesus as Lord and rejecting in our hearts His Lordship over us? Can we imagine that this is the way of salvation? Is it not an act of hypocrisy instead? And observe that Paul is speaking of the basic matter of salvation.

Romans 14:9 – Will He not begin to ful-

fill this purpose in everyone who comes to Him in faith?

Ephesians 2:10 and Philippians 1:6 – Part of the good work God starts in believers is to give them a heart to submit to the Lordship of Christ.

Philippians 2:10,11 – Surely God causes this to happen in all those whom He calls to Himself to be His people.

Colossians 2:6 – The Colossians received Jesus as Lord. This is the faith that was taught them and which they received. Surely all true believers follow their steps.

1 Thessalonians 1:9,10 – Here is an example showing what real conversion is. And can we think that any kind of true service to God is possible without receiving Jesus as Lord?

Hebrews 5:9 – Here we are plainly told that eternal salvation comes to those who obey Christ; by which it may be judged that saving faith and obedience to Christ go together. When God grants faith to anyone He gives at the same time an obedient heart.

See Hebrews 8:10; Ezekiel 36:26,27; etc.

1 Peter 1:2 – Observe that a primary purpose in God’s choice of people, and the purpose of the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing them to Christ, is that they might obey Jesus Christ. Notice too that here obedience is put before “sprinkling by His blood.”

1 Peter 4:17 – Peter points out that the “gospel of God” is something to be obeyed and that there is a fearful judgment coming on those who do not obey it.

1 John 2:4-6 – In the light of this, can we think that true and saving knowledge of Jesus is possible without having a heart to obey Him?

Revelation 3:20 – Observe in v 14 that He does not present Himself to this church as the Savior, but as the “Ruler of God’s creation” – v 14. This fact too is often neglected when using v 20. It is as Lord and King that He stands outside the door and knocks. And it is as such that He must be received. When He comes in all that He is – Lord, Savior, King – comes in at the same time. We cannot consciously receive Him

as Savior and refuse Him as Lord and King. And the more conscious we are of receiving the whole wonderful person and all that He is, the better it will be for our spiritual life.

Are any other Scriptures needed to show that turning in faith to Jesus Christ means receiving Him as both Savior and Lord? And a very important question is, have you done this?

Of course, not everyone who comes to Him is well instructed in this or is fully conscious of it. Nor am I saying that after believing we all obey Him perfectly in everything, or that we never rebel against Him. We all fail in many ways, including this way (James 3:2). But I am saying that when individuals really turn in faith to Him, God does a wonderful work in their minds and hearts (the new birth). Immediately He gives the Holy Spirit – the very Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ – to live in them, and this enables them to see who Jesus is and to receive Him as Savior and submit to Him as Lord. And this is all of grace. The person who wants to do the one without doing the other is on very dangerous ground. It is the

enemies of Jesus, not His friends, not His followers who say “We don’t want this man to reign over us” (Luke 19:14).

Those who are spiritually the children of Abraham (Romans 4:16) will do as Abraham did – “By faith Abraham....obeyed” (Hebrews 11:8.) See also James 2:14,17,20,24).

The New Testament everywhere teaches that salvation is by grace through faith alone. It also teaches that God saves us to make us Christ’s sheep who follow Him and are obedient to Him, and that any so called faith which refuses to submit to Jesus as Shepherd (Lord) is not true faith at all. It is presumption. True faith, this gift of God, is a powerful force in our lives that always produces action, the action of obedience to Christ. And through this gift of God, this grace, the law of God is written on our hearts (Hebrews 8:10,11. For if people think they may receive Jesus Christ as Savior and be safe forever while not receiving Him as Lord, won’t they try to do this?

Let us not try to do that, but rather receive Him and all He is into our hearts

and lives, and forever live in obedience to the Majesty on high, the King of kings, and Lord of lords.



THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST

***“If you continue in my word,
then you are truly my disciples,
and you will know the truth and
the truth will make you free”***

John 8:31,32

Yes, the Lord Jesus Christ has a school. The door is open and He is looking for pupils, calling out to people wherever they may be in the whole broad earth. But not everyone gets into his school. The pupils He selects are those who meet the school's requirements, as we shall see. And His school is no ordinary school. It is the only one of its kind in existence. It is the school of the spiritual life. The pupils in it are taught how to live and how to worship and serve God. What He wants them to learn is the greatest of all possible knowledge – the direct and personal knowledge of God, and of His Word, His ways and His will.

***There is a school for humble folk,
For all those who will bear Christ's yoke
And go with Him apart.
The teachings all come from above,
The one abiding rule is love,
The fee is our whole heart.***

In the New Testament the pupils in His school are called "disciples." This is the translation of a Greek word 'mathetes' which means "learners," "pupils," "students". In the Bible sense of the word, a true disciple is one who learns from the Lord Jesus with

the aim of putting His teaching into practice.

A very wonderful thing about this school is this: It has the greatest teacher of all time. Jesus Himself (together with the Father and the Holy Spirit) does the teaching (see Psalm 119:102; John 3:2; 6:45; 14:26; 1 John 2:20,27).

God raises up human teachers also to instruct those in Jesus' school. See Ephesians 4:11-13. Undoubtedly this is a great blessing to the church when such teachers proclaim the truth. However, for success in Christ's school dependence must be on Christ and His Word rather than on any human teacher. In His school one great textbook is used – the Bible. But He also uses these human teachers, and all the circumstances and experiences of life, and the work of His Spirit in our hearts and minds to teach us what He wants us to learn.

If we are not in this school of Jesus, no matter what other theological school or seminary or religious institution we may attend, or what church we may belong to, we will be taught by men, but Jesus will not be teaching us, except, perhaps, one thing – how

much we need to get into His school. And being taught only by men and not by God, in God's eyes our life and service (if any) will be a failure, though men might count them a success.

Well might we all cry out as King David did, "Show me Your ways, O LORD, teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me" (Psalm 25:3,4). If God is our teacher we will learn wonderful things indeed! And if we do not have Him as our teacher, our learning will be extremely limited, and it will not bring either the spiritual life or the spiritual grasp of the truth that we need. Men can instruct the mind and inform us of various facts. Jesus can open our minds to see what is behind the facts. He not only speaks the Word of God, He enables His disciples to understand it (see Luke 24:45).

In the New Testament the word "disciple(s)" is found more than 270 times. In Acts it appears 25 times and is the commonly used word for those who had believed in Christ and been baptized. The word Christian(s) is used only three times in the New Testament and the word "believers" only twice (of course, the words "believed", "believe", etc.

are used a great many more times). From the evidence it seems that the apostles made no distinction between Christ's believers and true disciples. Nor did Jesus, as far as I can see. And surely it is not possible to become a real believer in Jesus unless He teaches us. How else will we know what repentance is and actually repent, or what believing in Him means and actually believe? Becoming a disciple and believing in Him go together and we should not try to separate them. And we should not think, as apparently some do think, that we can become what we call believers now, and then, sometime down the road, if we wish to really follow Christ, we can become disciples. I see nothing like this in the Bible. Those who believe in Christ in the New Testament way are entering the school of Christ, though they may not be conscious of it at the time. Beware of trying to be a "believer" while rejecting discipleship. Self-deception in this matter is all too easy while the devil is prowling around.

It is interesting that the word "disciple" is not found in the letters of Christ's apostles to the churches. In them the word "brethren" is used to indicate Christians. "Brethren" is

used nearly 140 times, and, of course, indicates the closeness of the spiritual relationship of believers in Christ. However, it is evident that the apostles were doing what the Lord Jesus told them to do. And what is that?

He said “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt 28:19 – this is a literal translation of the Greek). And so in obedience to Christ the apostles made disciples and then taught them all that Jesus had taught them and revealed to them. So, although the word disciple is not found in their letters the fact of discipleship is everywhere in them.

Speaking in general, private schools and universities have some sort of entrance requirements. They want students to be qualified. But whether man’s schools have requirements or not, Christ’s school certainly has. His requirements are three. Unlike the schools of men, none of these has anything to do with intellect or talents or merit or such like. Jesus looks for things much more basic and important in His eyes. What Jesus requires has to do with the heart, the inner person, the hidden life and will. His require-

ments are proper attitudes and He spoke of them very plainly in Luke 14:25-35.

The first requirement or qualification, in the words of Jesus Himself: “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters. . . .he cannot be my disciple.” “Hate” is a very strong word meant to get our attention. Jesus is saying that our love for Him must be so great that other love is practically like hate. And those who would be disciples must hate any influence from anyone, even from those dear to them, that would try to turn them away from Jesus. We are not literally to hate anyone, but are to love even our enemies (Matthew 5:43,44) and most certainly members of our own families. In Luke 14:26 hate obviously means mean love less. Compare Matt 10:37. So the first requirement is this: our outlook toward others and Christ must be right. He must take first place in our hearts.

The second requirement: “Hate....his own life also. . . .And whoever does not carry his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” Here is the attitude of denial of self. It is the recognition that self belongs on a

cross that self, if we let it, will stand against our truly following Christ. We have all seen that in many people (and this has sometimes been true of all of us) self is king and insists on fulfilling its own desires. But in Christ's school, self is to be dethroned. Self is not to be fulfilled, not to be pampered, not to be exalted, but rejected for His sake. In the school of Christ this has very great importance. So our attitude toward ourselves must be right.

The third requirement: "Whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple." This means that our attitude toward things must be right. This is what Jesus demanded of the rich, young ruler who came to Him enquiring about eternal life (see Mark 10:17-22). Does He demand less of us? He does not. He loved that young man as He loves us, and so He told him the truth he needed. We too need to be freed from slavery to things to become His servants. We have needs as we live on this earth, and we must take care of those dependent on us, and for this we need money. But in our hearts we must count all that we have as His and try to use it (what He allows to remain with us) for His glory. We are to love Him so much

that laying everything at His feet is a joy, not some sad, burdensome thing. In fact, all of these three requirements may be reduced to one – love. What Jesus requires is simply our heart. When we give Him that, our love for Him will be greater than our love for anything or anyone else. And if we do not love Him we are in great trouble. 1 Corinthians 16:22 puts it very strongly – “If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.” And if we don’t give Him our hearts, what we will have is a heartless Christianity, and will show that we value others more than Him, or things more than Him, or self more than Him.

Do these requirements Jesus demands seem difficult? If we do not love Him, they are more than difficult – they are impossible to us. But if the Spirit of God has shown us who Jesus is, if we really understand what He has done for us on the cross, if the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (this happens when we trust in Christ), these requirements will seem reasonable, and natural to our new life. And know this – it is Christ who enables us to meet these requirements, to have this proper

outlook on others and self and things and Him. We don't have these requirements by birth – far from it. We are sinners, and, by nature, always choose self and others and the pleasure we find in things. But by His grace Christ qualifies the unqualified (see Colossians 1:12). By that grace alone He works in our hearts to bring about the right attitudes we need to be in His school.

When Jesus three times says, “Cannot be my disciple,” He obviously means a disciple in fact, not merely in name. In Christ's day many followed Him, seeming to be disciples, and heard Him speak. But how few truly learned from Him and put into practice what He taught! How few stayed with Him when He said hard things which they didn't understand! See John 6:66-68. Jesus really meant what He said in Luke 14:25-35. He never trifled with the truth. If you do not have the attitudes He insisted on, you will not even get in the door of Christ's school. You may be called a “Christian”, or even a “disciple”, but you will not be a real one. But, of course, you may hang around just outside the door and get some scraps of information. Is that enough for you?



PROSPERITY

Should a true believer in Christ aim to be financially prosperous? Should a follower of Jesus want to be rich?

Using the Bible, instead of what men call common sense, the answer to these ques-

tions is easy. If you don't want to know what the Bible teaches about this, but prefer to follow the teachings of some preacher or other, or some secular teacher of financial success, then stop reading this now. If you want to know only what the Bible teaches, read on.

As we look into this, remember an important thing. We now live in the days of the New Testament, not the Old. In Old Testament days things were not the same as now, in some ways God's method of dealing with His people was different, and some of His promises to them were different and do not apply to believers now. For example, in Old Testament days God promised prosperity if His people behaved in accordance with His word to them. And seeking riches was not forbidden. See verses like Deuteronomy 8:18; 28:1-14; Psalm 112:1-3; Proverbs 3:16; 24:3,4; Malachi 3:10. There are several righteous, rich people who appear in the pages of the Old Testament, and they were not told to give up their riches or not gain more. Of course, the warning is there that riches may not last, and that they should not trust in them.

But, someone may ask, aren't God's promises good forever? For those to whom God gave them, yes, they were good, as long as the conditions He laid down were met. But a promise made to the people of Israel under the old covenant God made with Moses does not necessarily apply to Christ's disciples now living under the new covenant. The physical things of the old covenant are but pictures, types, shadows of spiritual things under the new covenant. For example, the tabernacle was a physical thing on this earth, and physical activities went on there. But it was also a model, a type, a picture of heavenly spiritual realities. See Hebrews 9:1-15. For that matter, the whole law of Moses was but a shadow of the good things to come – Hebrews 10:1. And it may well be that the physical, temporal, financial prosperity sometimes promised under Moses' law is a picture of the eternal, spiritual prosperity and heavenly riches promised to Christ's believers now.

We live in a new era, under the new covenant, which has its own principles of behavior, its own promises, and its own rewards. See what Jesus five times said in the Sermon

on the Mount – “You have heard that it was saidBut I say to you.” The things they had heard said were things in the Old Testament. The things Jesus said were things relating to the new kingdom of God.

Those who have repented and believed in Christ are His disciples. It should be their chief concern to understand what He taught and put it into practice. We believers are His followers, not the followers of any man however famous he might be. So we will look at what Jesus taught concerning prosperity, riches, and this world’s goods. And then we will look at what His apostles taught, which things are inspired of God just as the teachings of Jesus are.

Jesus had a great deal to say about money, about riches. First, He said very clearly that we are not to seek worldly wealth. “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth. ...but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19,20). This is just as much a command of His as the command to love our brothers, to pray, or any other command. In that same chapter Jesus went on to say “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about

your body, what you will wear. . . .But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:25,33).

One day a man came to Jesus. His story is told in three of the Gospels, so we can judge that it is important for us to understand it. A number of things are revealed about him. He was young (Matthew 19:20). He was a ruler (Luke 18:18). He was very rich (Mark 10:22). He was quite religious (Mark 10:20). In spite of his riches and position of authority, he was humble – he knelt before Jesus in the dusty road (Mark 10:17). He was eager to hear what Jesus would say about his problem – he came running (Mark 10:17). He was apparently very thoughtful, for he asked an exceedingly important question, one that very few ever ask – “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” So we can see one more thing about him – evidently, in spite of his religion, he did not think he had eternal life.

We are told that Jesus looked at him and loved him (Mark 10:21). So desiring his highest good Jesus said the following thing to him: “One thing you lack. Go your way,

sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. And come, take up the cross and follow me.”

By this we can see how to lay up treasures in heaven – the thing Jesus ordered us to do in Matthew 6:19,20. “But wait,” someone may say, “is this the way we get eternal life? I thought all we had to do was believe in Jesus.” Well, since Jesus plainly thought that this is what the rich, young ruler needed to do, who of us can say anything against it? He is the Son of God, the one who gives eternal life, and He knows what people need to do to inherit it. The truth is this young man loved his riches more than eternal life, more than truth. And he did not love God. And as long as he remained in that state there would be no eternal life for him. He needed to repent of loving things not worthy of love and for not loving God. It is by repentance and faith that we get eternal life.

Would Jesus make it so difficult (seemingly) for that young man, and so easy for us? We too need to repent of all that would keep us from fully following Jesus. Here is what Christ Himself said about this matter of possessions – “So likewise, whoever of you

does not give up all that he has he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:32). Did He mean this? Let us not insult Him by ever thinking He did not.

Won’t 10% be enough to give up? It will not.

Jesus demands 100% of our hearts. We all need the ordinary things of life – food, clothing, shelter – to survive. And we need to take care of those dependent on us (1 Timothy 5:8). But Jesus wants our love, and when we truly give Him that, we give Him everything else we have. Then He lets us use what we need, and uses the rest for His kingdom. And He should do this. He is the King. The apostle Paul said as clearly as words can be said, “Having food and clothing, with these let us be content” (1 Timothy 6:8).

Here are more words of Jesus to His disciples: “Blessed are you poor.” We can see that He meant literally poor, for He went on to speak of their being hungry. “But woe to you who are rich,” He said, and went on to speak of their being full (Luke 6:20,24). See how contrary the teaching of Jesus is to the teaching of many Christian leaders today.

Now when a person becomes a disciple of Jesus he may already have some wealth, a fine house, etc. Should he give it all away? He should certainly give it to Jesus for His use, and then do with it however Christ directs. Many Christians could sell their expensive homes and live in cheaper ones, and use the extra money for the kingdom of God. It is time to get serious about the teachings of Jesus Christ.

It is possible than some may own a business when they become disciples of Jesus. Should they not try to gain prosperity through their business? Yes, if Jesus wants them to continue with their business, they should try to earn as much money as they can from it in an honest and legal way – not for themselves, but for the kingdom of God.

“SEEK FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD” is the word of Jesus to all of us.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 Paul says some very significant and helpful things about giving. Christ was rich but He became poor for our sakes that through His poverty we might be rich (verse 9). He is our example. We too should be willing to be poor so that oth-

ers can obtain the riches of eternal life. Paul went on to say that he did not want some Christians to be burdened and others eased in financial matters. He wanted there to be an “equality” (verses 13,14), so that some Christians would not have an overabundance while others have nothing.

He said also that Christ’s believers can experience prosperity – “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, so that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (9:8). Observe that this prosperity is not for oneself but to be able to do good things for others.

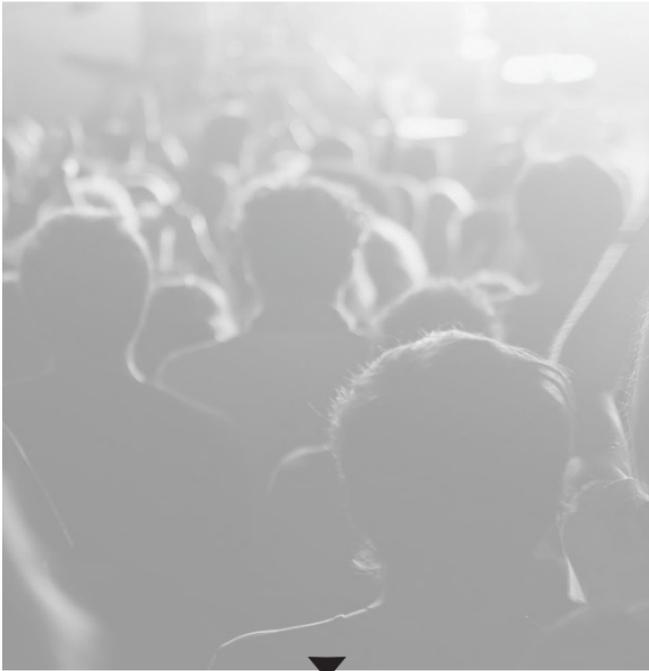
Paul too is an example to every Christian in all this: “I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8). Are not many Christians in these days living for “rubbish” and seeking to get more of it, and ignoring the true riches, the heavenly kind? In 1 Timothy 6:9,10,17-19 see more of what Paul said on this subject in strong words and true.

So now we are in a position to answer the questions that appear at the opening of this chapter.

Should a true believer in Christ aim to be financially prosperous? Should a follower of Jesus want to be rich?

The answer to both questions is a most emphatic NO. Christ's disciples should not aim to be prosperous, or rich. A real disciple of Jesus must have other aims altogether, much greater aims. These aims are to glorify God by what He has given us, to see that His work on earth prospers whether we do or not, and to help others, especially the poor, as much as we can. The way to this is not to ride in fancy cars, or wear fancy suits, or live in luxurious homes.

A big problem in affluent America is that many Christians, including many preachers, follow the ways of the world and are not at all serious about following the Lord Jesus Christ and putting into practice what He said about this matter of prosperity and riches. And who will be the great losers in the end?



THE ONE TRUE CHURCH

The word church is a translation of the Greek word “ecclesia.” In its singular and plural forms it is used 117 times in the New Testament, but only 3 times in the four Gospels, all in Matthew. The literal meaning of

the Greek word is “called out of,” and it came to mean a meeting or an assembly of people. In New Testament usage it means a group of individuals whom God has called out of the mass of mankind to be His people. The word never means a church building, but God’s people who meet in the building.

The first mention of “church” in the Bible is in Matthew 16:18 where Jesus says, “On this rock I will build my church.” So the true church is something Christ, not man, builds. In fact, in the Bible there is no specific instruction given to anyone to plant or build churches. Christ’s disciples were commanded to “make disciples of all nations” and to teach them all that Christ had taught. When this is done, local churches will spring up and those churches will be made up of disciples of Christ.

When Jesus said He would build His church “on this rock,” He was not referring to any particular individual such as Peter. In this same verse (Matthew 16:18) Jesus called Peter “petros” which means a smaller rock, or a piece of rock. When He said “on this rock” He used the word “petra.” This is the feminine form of the Greek word and means

a larger rock. This is a distinction made by God's Spirit who inspired Matthew's Gospel. He could have used the word "petros" the second time also, but He did not. So Jesus was not saying He would build His church on Peter. Actually that would be like trying to erect a World Trade Center on a pebble.

Later on, the apostle Paul said that the real foundation of Christian life and service is Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 3:11). And speaking of the church in Ephesians 2:20 he said that it is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." Then we can say that Peter was in the foundation along with all the other apostles and prophets, but that all of them together were far, far less than the chief cornerstone. In the Old Testament God Himself is often called a "Rock", and in 1 Corinthians 10:4 Christ is called "Rock" ("Petra" – the same word He used speaking about the foundation of His church in Matthew 16:18).

When Paul says that the church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, doubtless he means their teaching, their ministry. But this was simply in accordance

with what Christ had taught and commanded them to teach. And, of course, Peter was only one among many whom Christ used in this way.

Although Christ used the word “church” three times in the Gospels, He had some important things to say about the church in His prayer to His Father in John chapter 17, one of the very greatest chapters in the whole Bible. Please look up this chapter and read it now, if you have never done so. If you have read it previously, read it again to refresh your memory. In this prayer Jesus prays for Himself (verses 1-5), for His disciples of that day (verses 6-19), and for all of us who would believe in Him later on (verses 20,21), and for all His believers both those living at that time, and since that time (verses 22-26).

In verses 6-8 of that chapter, Jesus describes His believers, saying that the following things were true of them (they are still true of all believers):

They were a special gift of God the Father to His Son Jesus Christ. They kept His word.

They received the things Jesus taught them, were sure that He came from God and

believed that God the Father had sent Him into the world. He said further things about them in verse 14 – “The world has hated them because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world.” In other words, God has called them (and believers now) out of the world. This is the meaning of the word “ecclesia” – “church”. God has separated His believers from the world, has made them to be of heaven, not of the world. They are God’s children with a new life, new aims, a new master and Lord.

Jesus asks God the Father to keep His believers safe (verses 11,15). Since the prayers of Jesus are always answered, we may be sure that all His believers will be kept safe forever.

Also Jesus makes this request of the Father: “Sanctify them by Your truth” (verse 17). In verse 19 Jesus uses the same word about Himself – “I sanctify myself.” So the word “sanctify” here does not mean to make holy, or to purify, as in some places in the Bible. Jesus did not need to make Himself pure – He was always pure. The basic meaning of the word “sanctify” in both the Old and New Testaments is “to set apart.” So it can

also mean to dedicate or to consecrate. Jesus dedicated Himself for the work He came to do, He consecrated Himself to the Father's will. And in this prayer He asks the Father to set apart, to consecrate those who believed in him. And this God did in answer to Christ's prayer. We see the outworking of this in the book of Acts and in the rest of the New Testament. On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit of God descended on the waiting disciples, and a new work of God began on earth (Acts 2:1-4).

Also in John chapter 17 Jesus prayed that all His believers, both then and now, "may be one", "may be made perfect in one." And this oneness that He prayed for was just like the oneness of the Father and the Son (verses 21-23). The oneness of the Father and the Son is a oneness of life and spirit and nature, a oneness that is impossible to divide. And in answer to Christ's prayer, the oneness of His believers is just like that. This oneness has nothing to do with what some leaders of various denominations today are trying to achieve – organizational unity. In fact, men can never create the oneness Jesus prayed for. This is something God the Father has

already done. All those born again through faith in Christ from the first century up to now, wherever they may be, whatever local church they attend, are made a part of that living unity. Jesus was praying about the one true church, and this prayer, as all His prayers, was answered.

The apostle Paul set forth this truth very clearly in 1 Corinthians 12:12,13 – “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body.” By “we” he meant all those who had repented and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who had experienced the new birth, those who had received the Spirit of God to live in them. We know this is what he meant by studying the letters he wrote. Those who have the Spirit of God belong to Christ and are in His body, and those who do not have the Spirit are not His and not in His body (no matter what local church has them as members). He tells us this in Romans 8:9. The Spirit of God lives in Christ’s true believers and they and they alone belong to Christ’s Body, the one true Church.

In Ephesians Paul referred to this Body again. He says that God has put “all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:23,24). He goes on to say that believers should “endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace. There is one Body and one Spirit” (Ephesians 4:3,4). There are not many bodies of Christ, composed of the members of each local church, or any such thing. There is “one Body.” The unity of the Spirit in the Body of Christ, His church, already exists. Men cannot create it and they should not try. But believers should keep this unity which will always exist “in the bonds of peace.” We all know that they do not always do this. Alas, all too often there are divisions among the people of God over matters that should not cause divisions. Instead of the bonds of peace there are factions and quarrels and fighting. See 1 Corinthians 3:3,4. Not everyone always tries to do his or her part to make local churches reflect the unity of the Body, by living harmoniously with all the other members in them. But the prayer of Jesus was answered and the real unity of the Body of Christ will

always remain, regardless of what individual Christians or churches may do, or not do.

Of course, even true believers, possessing the Holy Spirit and loving Jesus Christ, may find areas of disagreement with other believers. We do not see everything alike. We have not all reached the same degree of understanding of God's Word. But there should be a spirit of love and kindness when these disagreements appear. And we should all be moving toward complete unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. See Ephesians 4:13.

So the clear teaching of the Bible is this: There is one true worldwide church, the Body of Christ.

All who have received the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and in this way have been born again and received His Spirit, are in this one true church. No one else is in it. This one true church has one and only one Head. He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

If Christians are not in this one true church, no matter what other church they may belong to, it will do them no good in the matter of salvation.

Every local church should be like a miniature body of Christ, being taught what He taught, being led by its leaders as He would lead, serving God as He wants them to serve, submitting in all things to its Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, recognizing the unity of the Spirit in the body, and doing all they can to keep that unity in the bonds of peace.

There is one and only one way into the true church, the Body of Christ. This way is not baptism, not confirmation, not any ordinance or sacrament of any church, not any good deeds that anyone can do. The one way is true repentance and a living faith in Jesus Christ that receives Him into the heart and life as Lord and Savior. And this is all of grace. It is a gift of God. See Ephesians 2:8,9 and Titus 3:3-5. It is the Holy Spirit of God who brings people into this true church, and if He does not do it, no man can do anything to accomplish it.

Are you in this one true church, this Body of Christ? If not, receive Christ as your own Savior and Lord today, and begin to enjoy the wonderful blessings which flow from that.



THE BAPTISM AND GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

There is much confusion in some Christian circles today about the meaning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the anointing of the Spirit, and the gifts of the Spirit. And

there is a great deal of false teaching about them. Let us look into the Bible where alone proper answers can be found to any questions about these matters.

The “anointing” of the Spirit is referred to only in five verses of the New Testament. Two of these refer to the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:27; 10:38). Once Paul spoke of being “anointed” (2 Corinthians 1:21), and John referred to the anointing three times in 1 John 2:20, 27. See the anointing of Jesus in Matthew 3:16. Anointing evidently means the same thing as the Spirit coming on individuals – Acts 1:8

“Baptized with the Holy Spirit” – this could also be translated “Baptized in [or by] the Holy Spirit” (the Greek word means with, in, or by). There are only a very few references in the Bible which use this phrase. The words of John the Baptist are recorded in each of the four gospels. He said that Jesus is the one who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (see Matt 3:11). Then we have Jesus’ words in Acts 1:5. Peter quotes these words in Acts 11:16. Then we have Paul’s words in 1 Cor 12:13. That is all.

Jesus disciples experienced this baptism on the on the day of Pentecost. Four expressions are used to describe what happened to them.

In Acts 1:5 it is ***“baptized with the Holy Spirit.”***

In Acts 1:8 it is ***“the Holy Spirit comes on you.”***

In Acts 2:4 it is ***“filled with the Holy Spirit.”***

In Acts 10:47 it is ***“received the Holy Spirit.”***

All four references speak of the same event described in 2:1 4. On that day Christ gave them God’s Spirit in a new way. This was like immersing them in the Spirit, or pouring the Spirit on them (2:33; 10:45), and the result was that their whole inner being was filled with the Spirit, and they received power to live the Christian life and to witness and serve God as they ought. They began to live and move in God’s Spirit, to be inspired, motivated, and controlled by God’s Spirit. From that time to this, individuals receive God’s Spirit when they believe in the Lord Jesus (see John 7:37-39; Gal 3:2; Eph 1:13).

How could they not? To receive Christ is to receive His Spirit also. If they have not received Christ's Spirit they do not belong to Christ at all; that is, they have not really believed in Him or been born from above (see Rom 8:9).

No Scripture says that as believers in Christ we should seek for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Not one anywhere. Those who teach we should seek for it misunderstand the teaching of the New Testament on the subject – or else have some agenda of their own. Why should anyone insist that Christians seek something God has not said they should seek?

According to 1 Corinthians 12:12,13 every believer has been baptized with God's Spirit into the Body of Christ. The Greek word translated "with" may also be translated "by" or "in" God's Spirit – the Greek word can mean any of these, and the same word is used in 1 Corinthians as Acts 1:5. This baptism into the Body of Christ, the true church, happens when they receive the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Christ's followers no longer have to wait for this as the original

apostles had to wait for God's appointed time for the coming of the Spirit. God had chosen that day of Pentecost to begin this era of the Spirit, this age of grace, this new work in the earth. Now, since it has begun and has been going on for these many centuries waiting is no longer necessary. All who have received the Lord Jesus Christ by faith have been baptized with the Holy Spirit, and they have also been anointed with the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:20, 27).

After receiving the Holy Spirit by receiving Christ, and, at that same time, being baptized by the Spirit into Christ's Body, every believer should earnestly seek to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18). This we are very plainly told to do. There is only one baptism of the Holy Spirit, but believers may be filled again and again, if they fail to maintain the fullness. And recognizing that we have the Spirit living in us, that we have been baptized with the Spirit, if we have reason to think that we are not filled with Him, we should seek the fullness of the Spirit with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. It is essential to our Christian life,

witness and service.

In Acts 2:4 it says the disciples were “filled with the Holy Spirit” – the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had promised them in 1:5, and which they now received, produced this result. The signs which accompanied the filling on the day of Pentecost (sound of a wind, tongues like fire, and speaking in foreign tongues) are not the important things. The important thing is to be filled with the Spirit. God may give signs or withhold them as He pleases, but He will infallibly give the fullness of the Holy Spirit to those who seek Him in faith (Acts 2:39; Luke 11:13). God nowhere in the Bible instructs us to seek for the signs that appeared then (compare Matt 12:38,39). He never tells us to seek for the mere gift of tongues. Not once, anywhere.

Can a person know he is filled with the Holy Spirit if there are no accompanying signs? Certainly. He can know by faith (1 John 5:14,15), faith based on God’s promises and the knowledge of what God wants us to have. And his experience afterwards will confirm that he is filled with the Spirit

– he will have power for holy living and for witness and service (see also Eph 5:19-21)

Acts 2:4 says that the disciples began to speak with (or in) other tongues (or languages). Verses 8-11 of that same chapter show us the meaning of this. The God fearing Jews seen there were natives of Judea (verse 9), or had lived abroad and had returned to Jerusalem. Fifteen different lands are mentioned, from what is now called Iran on the east to Rome on the west. What they said is very revealing – “We hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” So it is clear that God gave those disciples the instant ability to speak foreign languages which they had never learned. Their words were clearly understood by those who heard them (whether the disciples themselves understood what they were saying is not revealed). The tongues they spoke were no tongues of angels, or strange sounds that no one could understand.

Some people teach that speaking in tongues is the essential sign that always accompanies the baptism of God’s Spirit. At Pentecost when the apostles spoke in

“tongues” they were speaking known languages which people there understood. If this is the sign that always accompanies Spirit baptism, then we would have to say that this baptism must be extremely rare indeed in our day and very uncommon in the whole history of the Church. But we know very well that a great many people have been baptized with the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit without speaking in “tongues” as the disciples did in the beginning, or in any other way (I am one of them).

Paul reveals in chapter 12 of 1 Corinthians that the use of any spiritual gift, not one particular gift, was evidence that God was working in a person (verses 7-11). Any of the gifts, he says, was a “manifestation of the Spirit.” Not all spiritual gifts are in this list Paul gives in those verses. He mentions some others in verse 29 and in Rom 12:6-8.

In 1 Corinthians chapters 12-14 Paul teaches the following twelve things about spiritual gifts.

God’s Spirit gives them (12:4,7,11). They are given and should be used under the Lord-

ship of Christ (12:3,5). Each believer has some gift or other (12:7,11). No particular gift is possessed by all believers (12:29,30). All the gifts are for the good of all, not for personal benefit (12:7; 14:9; 10:33 – 11:1). God gives the gifts to promote unity, not to divide believers (12:25). God's love working in believers is greater than any gift or all of them together (13:1-13). Believers should desire spiritual gifts (12:31; 14:1). Prophecy is the greatest of the gifts (14:1). No one should think himself superior to others because he has some gift or other (4:7; 13:4; 12:21,25). In using the gifts believers must behave in a fitting and orderly way (14:40). Believers should earnestly desire the best spiritual gifts (14:1).

If every believer had always taken all these truths to heart, there would not have been all the quarreling and divisions over spiritual gifts that have afflicted the churches.

Have the gifts Paul wrote about passed away? Are none of them in existence now among God's people? Some gifts of the Spirit have surely not passed away. For example, teaching, helps, administrations in 12:28

(and quite possibly others there), and ministry, exhortation, giving, leading and showing mercy in Romans 12:7,8. Have any of the others passed away? Some godly ministers teach that the gifts of prophecy, knowledge and tongues have definitely passed away (and perhaps others also), and refer to 1 Corinthians 13:8-12 as evidence for this. There Paul says that love will go on forever, but that prophecies, tongues, and knowledge will fail, cease, vanish away. He seems to be referring to three of the spiritual gifts seen in 12:8-10 (his meaning may possibly be wider than this). These teachers think that verse 10 supports their view. They seem sure that Paul meant those gifts would pass away at the completion of the New Testament (“that which is perfect”). Until then, they teach, the gifts (that which Paul calls “in part”) were needed because the Church did not have God’s full revelation of truth, but afterwards they were not needed and so passed away. They think the gifts were useful only during the childhood of the Church (v 11), but not now during the times of its maturity.

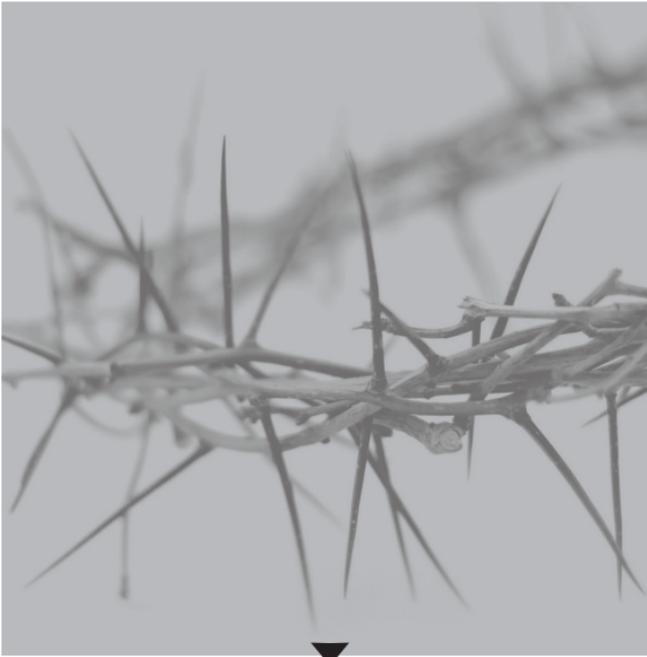
This interpretation strikes me as not im-

possible, but unlikely. Verse 12 seems to put the time of the “perfect” at the end of this age, or when believers are “face to face” with Christ, and not at the completion of the New Testament in the first century. The time of “perfection” is a time when they shall “know” even as Christ now knows them. This did not take place at the completion of the New Testament. I do not believe the Bible anywhere teaches that those gifts would either pass away or not pass away after the days of the apostles.

God has freedom to do what He wants to do. And if it is His good pleasure to give those gifts to anyone today, He will do so. And if He wants to withhold them from anyone, He will do so. This is all under the control of the Holy Spirit of God (12:11), and He will not be bound by our ideas.

Finally, let us love one another, and accept one another even when we disagree about matters that are not basic to the true Christian faith. And let us not fret about those gifts and abilities God has not given us, or pretend we have them when we do not. And let us never use the ones He has given to

exalt self, but for His glory and for the good of others. And let us continue to study the Scriptures about all this, and pray for wisdom and understanding as we do so.



TRIBULATION

The word tribulation in the New Testament is a translation of a Greek word – “thlipsis” – used 45 times. In the King James Version it is translated by seven different words – “tribulation(s)”, “trouble”, “affliction”, “afflicted”, “persecution”, “anguish”, “burdened”. The Greek word literally means “pressure”, “pressing.” In general it can indicate any

kind of pressure, anything that presses on the spirit, that burdens the heart, or anything that results in mental or physical distress.

God's people face all these things and others besides – the “tribulation” that comes to them because they belong to Him. It may be simply ridicule – which can be quite humiliating and painful, especially for young believers. Or it can be fierce persecution resulting in death, as in many places in the world in our day. Or it could be anything in between – pressure of pains and distresses of various kinds which come as a trial of faith. It could be danger of physical harm, or financial pressure. It could be the pain some feel when they are discriminated against, or rejected by their friends because they believe in Christ. Tribulations include all the difficulties that Christ's people are called on to undergo because, as Jesus said, the world of fallen men hates them (John 15:19) and the devil hates them and is determined to cause them as much trouble as he can.

Some of the things mentioned above are usually not as evident in a country like America, but I have served God many years in a

land where often these things are not mere words, but harsh realities – India. And there are a number of countries in the world where tribulations are as bad or worse than they are in India.

Let us see what Jesus taught about His people and tribulation.

“Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you. . . . Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” – Matt 5:10-12.

“They will deliver you up to tribulation and will kill you” (Matthew 24:9).

“In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer. I have overcome the world” – John 16:33.

When we read the book of Acts we see how all this was fulfilled in the early church. And we have there the words of Paul and Barnabas, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” – Acts 14:22.

Here is the teaching of the apostle Paul about tribulation:

“We glory in tribulations also, knowing

that tribulation produces patient endurance, and patient endurance, approved character, and approved character, hope” – Romans 5:3,4.

“Joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” – Romans 8:17.

“Our light affliction (light! See 2 Corinthians 11:23-28), which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” – 2 Corinthians 4:17.

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you” – Colossians 1:24.

Here is what Peter said about tribulation: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps” – 1 Peter 2:21.

“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind” – 1 Peter 4:1.

“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you, but rejoice to the extent that you partake of

Christ's sufferings" – 1 Peter 4:12.

Anyone reading the Bible can see that the history of God's people is full of tribulation. In the Old Testament we have Job and David and the prophets of God, and the unknown servants of God who suffered for Him. "Others were torturedStill others had trial of mockings and beatings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were pelted with stones, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented" – Hebrews 11:36,37. In the New Testament we see a continuation of all this, just as Jesus said it would happen. God's servants were opposed, threatened, harmed, jailed, and killed.

Here is the teaching of the Bible about tribulation and God's children.

1. Tribulation, trouble, pressure is to be expected as the natural accompaniment of faith in Christ, the natural environment of true Christians, the garden where the sweetest flowers grow, the weather that produces the sturdiest plants.

2. It is a trial of faith that produces great

results. As such it should be rejoiced in, gloried in – 1 Peter 1:7; 4:12,13; Romans 5:3,4. Tribulation is a part of God’s method to work that patient enduring faith that is so precious in His sight. God will bring great trials on those whom He wants to bless in remarkable ways.

3. Enduring tribulation is a source of great glory. Jacob, wounded, becomes a prince with God. Joseph, rejected and afflicted, becomes a beautiful picture of Christ. Job, struck to the earth, becomes an instrument in God’s hand to shut Satan’s mouth. Paul, suffering, was filling up “what is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh, for the sake of his body, which is the church” (Colossians 1:24). According to the Bible (and this alone should be our source of information about it), tribulation is not a thing to avoid at all costs, a thing to despair about. That is the way of the world. Tribulations and troubles provide us with great opportunities to glorify God in the fires. It reveals what God can do for His own in the storm.

4. The enduring of such trials and tribulations will result in praise and honor and glory at the coming of Christ. We might even

say that there is a close connection between present suffering and future glory that is not often understood – Matt 5:10-12; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 4:13. Suffering for Christ here will be very rewarding in heaven. Should we want to miss out on these rewards?

5. Enduring tribulation for Christ is a sign that we are blessed, that the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us – 1 Peter 4:14.

6. Suffering with Christ is one of the greatest privileges His believers can have on earth. See Phil 1:29; Acts 9:16; 1 Pet 4:13. Here are the words of a famous Indian Christian, Sadhu Sunder Singh, who once when he lay almost unconscious after persecution said “I am very happy. How sweet it is to suffer for His sake.”

7. The tribulation of the saints is the suffering of Christ. We who belong to Him are members of His body, and what the body suffers, the head also suffers. See Acts 9:4; Isaiah 63:9; Romans 8:17; Colossians 1:24.

The most glorious annals of the Church are those that record God’s people in the midst of suffering, rising superior to pain, triumphing

over torture and death. What great glory to God it was and is! Do not be surprised if the record is not finished, if the brightest, most stirring pages of all are yet to be written.

The anxious desire to escape tribulation does not seem to be in accord with the spirit of Paul – “we glory in tribulations also”; or Moses, who chose to “suffer affliction with the people of God” (Hebrews 11:25); or the disciples, who, when they were beaten, rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). None of these considered that escaping tribulation was a prize to be sought, a special reward for holy living, or the natural right of the church.

It seems that, to a great extent, A. W. Tozer was right when he wrote about Christianity in the West: “Without doubt we of this generation have become too soft to scale great spiritual heights. Salvation has come to mean deliverance from unpleasant things. Our hymns and sermons create for us a religion of consolation and pleasantness. We overlook the place of the thorns, the cross and the blood.” Pleasantness and escape from tribulation – that is the message we often hear in churches today in the USA.

We can know that whatever tribulation comes to us, Jesus Christ, the mighty One, the loving One is with us through it all. Nothing can separate us from His love – “Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution? . . . In all these things we are more than conquerors” – Romans 8:35-37.

Jesus warned His people that at the end of this age there would be “great tribulation.” He did not at all indicate that it would be different from tribulations His people face in every generation, only that it would be greater, that is, more severe, more widespread. After all, everything that Satan and evil men can do against God’s people has already been done, and is still being done today somewhere on earth. What more can His people face than fierce persecution, tortures, and death? I believe what is written above about tribulation now can apply equally well to the Great tribulation.

If you teach the rapture comes before the great tribulation, please don’t teach that it is to escape that tribulation. Paul clearly taught us that tribulation works good for God’s people. Great tribulation, then, must work great good. So if the Lord has His Church enter

the great tribulation, I, for one, will not be shocked, or even surprised. After all, it will be the same kind of tribulation God's dear people have endured from the beginning, because it will come from wicked men and from Satan, just as it has always come. The great tribulation is simply the large-scale culmination of the tribulation that God's children have always experienced. And we know that some of God's dear saints will be in it – Revelation 7:13,14; 12:17; 13:7. In all times Christ has been with His saints. Will He not be with them then? (How else could they be saints?)

Is there any reason why I too should not be in the great tribulation? Well, perhaps I am not as worthy of it as they will be. But since Peter told us to arm ourselves with the mind to face tribulation, I have tried to do this. Perhaps I will be permitted to be in that final struggle of this age, the struggle of antichrist against Christ, and have the privilege of standing against that son of perdition and suffering or even dying for Christ's sake. If this comes my way, I want to be like the apostles who rejoiced when they experienced persecution and tribulation, and sang songs at midnight.