

# DISCIPLESHIP

## 101

BASICS FOR BELIEVERS



COMPILED BY HAYES PRESS

**DISCIPLESHIP 101:**  
**BASICS FOR BELIEVERS**  
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## **CHAPTER ONE: SECURE IN CHRIST**

The Bible teaches that every born-again person is secure in Christ; that our eternal salvation received through faith in Him cannot be lost.

It is a main-line truth of God's Word, but one which is very often misunderstood and challenged. "Does it not encourage careless living?" some ask, and the apostle Paul deals with that very question when he asks, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" (Romans 6:1). His reasoned answer makes it clear that there is another main-line truth running through the Scriptures, that if our lives are to be kept for the service of God we have to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling (see Philippians 2:12).

So two aspects of salvation are in view and we have to differentiate between them. Salvation from sin's penalty comes as a gift from God apart from our works, and it is a once-for-all experience. Salvation from sin's power in our lives is an ongoing daily experience and God looks for our cooperation with the Holy Spirit in working it out. These are parallel lines of truth and as we diligently study the Scriptures we shall be able to rightly divide the word of truth as the margin reference of 2 Timothy 2:15 puts it. With these in mind I invite you to consider with me three strong reasons (out of many) why the born-again believer is secure in Christ.

### **"In Christ"**

Our first reason is contained in the expression "in Christ". It frequently occurs in Paul's epistles and tells of our relationship to Christ when we believe on Him. God takes us out of the world and places us in Christ. So definitely is this the case that when Christ died God counted us to have died with Him and when He was raised again God reckoned us to have been raised with Him. And Ephesians 1:4 tells us that "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world". Away in eternity past God knew all about us and He chose us to be eternally saved and nothing can alter that decision. The Lord Jesus said:

this is the will of Him that sent Me, that of all that which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on Him, should have eternal life (John 6:39,40).

Eternal life is one of the gifts that comes to us in this great package of spiritual blessings in Christ and there is no way it can be lost, for it was "promised before times eternal" (Titus 1:2). Now to point number two.

### **Children of God**

When a person believes in the Lord Jesus he is born-again and becomes a child of God. This new birth is the work of the Holy Spirit using the incorruptible seed of the Word of God and as a result the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature (1 Peter 1:23; 2 Peter 1:4). That is why John says so plainly “Whosoever is begotten of God doeth no sin, because His seed abideth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is begotten of God” (1 John 3:9). It is the new nature in us which does not sin. It cannot sin for it is God’s nature, and it follows therefore that, possessing it, we cannot be lost. There is a part of us, of course, which is very liable to sin, and John speaks about that also. “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). We have to understand the two lines of truth and rightly divide between them.

But we can see that having become a child of God we cannot cease to be part of God’s family. When God becomes our heavenly Father and we His children it is in a relationship which cannot be broken. How we behave as His children is another matter about which the Bible has much to say. It speaks of reward for those who love Christ and serve Him faithfully; and it speaks also of loss to those whose works are burned up at the judgement seat of Christ. That is where the assessment of our works will be made and we must each stand before His judgement seat. 1 Corinthians 3:13-15 speaks about it, and please notice carefully verse 15, “if any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as through fire”. Notice the distinction between himself and his works. It is the works that are burned; the man himself is saved, for a child of God cannot be lost. Reward and loss have to do with service and not with our eternal life. And now to our third reason.

### **Members of His Body**

Another thing which happens when a person believes in Christ is that he becomes a member of the Church which is His Body, joined to Him as the Head as the members of our human body are joined to one another. And this happens to us all. “In one Spirit were we all baptized into one Body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). Christ is the Baptizer and He is also the Preserver of the Body. It is safe in His keeping until He presents it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing. The very first time He spoke about it He said “the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). The whole Body and every member of it are absolutely secure against any working of Satan or his hosts of evil. If one of the redeemed were to be lost, the Church, His Body would no longer be perfect, and that is impossible.

But does Scripture not speak about being severed from Christ? It does. In the Revised

Version, Galatians 5:4 is translated: “ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace”. But the margin explains the Greek word translated severed means brought to nought. The Authorised Version gets nearer to the true meaning in its translation, “Christ is become of no effect unto you”. Reading the verse in its context, we understand that if the Galatians were going back to the keeping of the law they would fall away from the grace which had saved them and their lives would become ineffective in the service of God. It was not their eternal salvation Paul was referring to but their lives of service.

This question of reading scripture in its context is most important if we are to understand what God is saying. This applies to every Bible subject, and in this subject of our security in Christ we see how confused people become when they fail to do this. There are many New Testament verses which seem at first to contradict the truth of our eternal security, but when we read the passage in its context with these two main-line truths in mind, we see there is no conflict, but rather a lovely blending together of divine truth.

Secure in Christ? Yes, we must be, for when the Saviour cried “It is finished” all that was required for our Salvation was done. And our security rests on His finished work. He has obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12) and how could it be eternal if it were possible to lose it? And all the redeemed are sanctified (Hebrews 10:10) and perfected for ever (Hebrews 10:14). God says so, and He has done it through His Son and “I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever” (Ecclesiastes 3:14).



## CHAPTER TWO: BAPTISM

Baptism and baptize are New Testament words which occur over 100 times. Without exception their derivation is from a Greek word meaning “to dip” or “to immerse”. It is unfortunate that the English translators preferred to anglicize the word into “baptize” rather than use the more common words, for therein lies the source of the many differences in the interpretation of Scripture and of practice. This made baptism into a sacrament which they felt should not be debased by using everyday words to describe it.

Three of the baptisms mentioned in the New Testament Scriptures are: 1) The baptism in the Holy Spirit, 2) the baptism of John; and 3) the baptism of the disciple. In none of these baptisms is the Greek word for “sprinkling” or “pouring” used. Rhantismos, sprinkling, is found in Hebrews 12:24 and 1 Peter 1:2 and proschysis and ekcheo, pouring, are found in Hebrews 11:28; Acts 2:17,18 and Revelation 16. These have no relation to baptism which is the subject before us.

Sometimes baptism is used as an illustration and the picture in 1 Corinthians 10:1,2 is helpful: “Our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” The cloud covered them and the waters rose up on either side of them, thus they were “immersed”. This was a once-for-all baptism of the children of Israel. Never again were they to return to Egypt. It signified that they were now dead to Egypt with all its miseries of hardship and labour and dead to all its pleasures and its good things such as they remembered when the way was hard in the wilderness. They had died to Egypt and they now looked to one man, Moses, as their leader. Keeping this picture in mind we can learn some lessons that the New Testament teaches about the baptism of the believer in the Spirit, and the disciple in water.

When John came to Israel preaching the baptism of repentance it was no makeshift message. It was the counsel of God for those days (Luke 7:30) and the Pharisees rejected it by not being baptized of John. The Lord upheld it (Matthew 21:25) and was subject to it (Matthew 3:15). That baptism was not John’s idea is clear from John 1:3:

“He that sent me to baptize with water... said unto me, upon whomsoever thou shalt see the Spirit descending ... the same is He that baptizeth in the Holy Spirit.”

God revealed to him that the One he had baptized was “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world”; it was God who had sent him to baptize. His baptism was unto repentance, that is to bring to repentance. John also realized that his baptism was leading to something else in that he spoke of the One who would baptize in the Holy Spirit,

whereas he could only baptize in water. This leads us naturally on to the consideration of baptism in the Holy Spirit.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:13 tells us that in the one Spirit we were all baptized into the one Body. No longer is it John or any of the Lord's disciples that baptize, but the Lord Jesus Himself, as John clearly foresaw. No longer is water the medium, but the Holy Spirit. The baptism is something that is unseen. It is not a matter of open evidence either to ourselves or others. We may be totally unaware of what has taken place spiritually at the time, but it is a once-for-all transaction. It signifies that we have died to sin in the sense that its penalty will never be exacted from us.

“If any man is in Christ he is a new creature: the old things are passed away; behold they are become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Never again will we need to be baptized in the Spirit, for we can never lose the salvation that we have been given from the Lord. We might lose the joy of it, but we never can lose eternal life itself. This is no sprinkling of the Spirit or any pouring on of the Spirit but a complete immersion in the Spirit. It has nothing to do with our spiritual health after salvation, but everything to do with our security in Christ. It is an act once-for-all done that will never need to be repeated: the Holy Spirit indwells us; we have received the earnest of the Spirit, have been sealed with the Spirit, and when the Lord comes to the air we will respond to His call whether we are alive or dead or even spiritually asleep.

It is clear from the Lord's words in Matthew 28:19,20 that He looked for further movement from His followers after their salvation. His command was:

“Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the consummation of the age” (Revised Version Margin).

Scholars of the original language point out that the imperative verb in the sentence is “make disciples”, that is, make those who are willing to follow. The preaching of the “simple gospel of repentance”, as some describe it, is not alone envisaged here although it is comprehended in the command. Not only are sinners to be turned to the Saviour, but they are to be instructed on how to be followers. As the first step they are to be baptized and then taught all that the Lord commanded His disciples. That the disciples obeyed this instruction is seen from Acts 2:41, 42 when those who received the word were baptized, added to the church of God in Jerusalem, and then taught the doctrine of the Lord by the apostles.

This baptism was to express openly that there had been a real break with the past just as the baptism of the children of Israel and the baptism in the Holy Spirit had been. This picture is further seen in Romans 6:4 where the apostle reminds the saints in Rome that they had been buried with Him through baptism into death and had been raised to walk in newness of life. This commandment is extant and will remain so until the Lord comes for His own. Death followed by burial naturally prevents our returning to our former way of life.

The formula given by the Lord Jesus was into the Name (singular) of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; three Persons, but one Name as accords with such scriptures as 2 Corinthians 13:14. Obedience to the One implies obedience to all Three, and although in Acts 8:16 and 19:5 we read of persons being “baptized into the Name of the Lord Jesus”, this does not imply that this was a different baptism from Matthew 28, or that the words commanded by the Lord Jesus were not spoken at their baptism. It expresses the authority by which the baptism was carried out.

It is also clear from the New Testament that it was only those who were believers on the Lord Jesus who were baptized, that is, those who were capable of making a conscious decision to accept Him as Saviour. Nowhere in Scripture do we find any support for the practice of infant baptism or the sprinkling of infants who are not old enough to have accepted Christ for themselves.

This practice came into being some 200 years after the apostles, and was condemned by many of the early fathers as unscriptural and therefore unacceptable. Sadly, their counsel was not accepted and human reasoning superseded the Word of God. As time progressed infant sprinkling was accepted more generally in Christendom and developed into the social ritual that we now see so frequently associated with such celebrations. It has no place in Scripture and should have no place in the life of the disciple and in his family.

Some have practised household baptism on the grounds that households were baptized in Scripture and reference is made to Acts 16:15, 33 and to the baptism of the house of Stephanas in 1 Corinthians 1:16. In the cases of Lydia and Stephanas there is no indication that anyone was baptized who was not a believer, and in the case of the jailer it is clear from verse 34 that it was those who were capable of listening to the Word and rejoicing in it who were baptized. There is no support for the baptism of infants in Scripture; human reasoning has been allowed to take precedence over the Word of God.

## CHAPTER THREE: DECISION AND DEDICATION

Indecision can be an insidious enemy taking years of potential service from a Christian life.

From time to time, God has faced His people with a clear challenge to be decisive. Joshua gathered Israel together and reviewed the Lord's goodness to them saying: "I brought your fathers out of Egypt. I brought you into the land of the Amorites ... destroyed them... delivered you ... sent the hornet before you ... gave you a land and cities ... vineyards and oliveyards ... now therefore ... choose you this day whom ye will serve (Joshua 24:6-15).

This challenge was issued at Shechem, which comes from a root word meaning to start early in the morning, to load up for a full day's work. Today, God has brought us to our Shechem in the words of the poet:

Give God thy best! In true heart consecration  
Offer to Him thy fragrant morning hours.  
Think not to find His reconciliation  
When darkness falls and thou hast spent thy powers.  
Give God thy best! In unreserved surrender  
Yield Him thy life in all its youthful prime.  
Wait not until thy sun hath set in splendour  
And thou hast nothing but the evening time.

At a later date, Elijah, perplexed by Israel's indecisive hopping from one foot to the other, gathered them to confront them with the words "How long halt (the Hebrew word means to "hop") ye between two opinions?" (1 Kings 18:21). Joshua had stood on the ridge of Shechem; Elijah on mount Carmel, which means a garden green with produce or a vineyard with thriving vines. From the clear vantage point of youth, with a life of spiritual fruitfulness ahead we say:

Give to Him life's brightest hours,  
He will make them still more bright;  
Give to Him your noblest powers,  
He will hallow all your might.

Paul, writing to the Church of God in Rome, the city built on seven hills and whose name means strong, reviewed the goodness of God and called for a positive response saying, "I

beseech you therefore ... by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

From the skull-shaped hill outside Jerusalem comes our Saviour’s own bidding, “If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

### **Ruth’s Example**

Naomi looked affectionately at her two daughters-in-law and three times she asked them to return to Moab as she spelled out the cost of continuing. The girls dissolved into tears. Then Orpah made a move. She kissed Naomi and slipped her grasp. It was a simple act, but with binding consequences. She was going back. Her shrinking figure moved eastwards towards Moab, its god Chemosh, and scriptural oblivion. Naomi grieves as Orpah leaves. Thank God, Ruth cleaves. Once more Naomi pleads with Ruth to go back with Orpah. While not sanctioning Naomi’s word, the Lord allowed it to be the final probe which brought Ruth’s decision and dedication into sharp focus. “Would ye also go away?” the Lord asked the twelve, drawing from Peter that noble commitment “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:67,68).

So Ruth, challenged again, responded with those words of lasting dedication: “Intreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Marvellous promise of commitment on the Bethlehem road, which has inspired others to faithful allegiance. Fellow disciple, shall we respond with similar clarity? A hymnwriter once wrote:

In the glad morning of my day,  
My life to give, my vows to pay,  
With no reserve and no delay,  
With all my heart, I come.

When Naomi “saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, she left speaking unto her” (1:18). In this way Scripture identifies the wellspring of Ruth’s memorable choice, a steadfast mind. In the context, the Hebrew word indicates that Ruth strengthened herself to go. It is the same word which the Lord used when He exhorted Joshua, “Be strong and of a good courage” (1:6). Carrying, as it does, the thought of steeling oneself against dissuasion, it challenges each of us to (re)pledge ourselves, whatever the cost or

distraction, to the One who took up His cross for our sakes.

What a gracious Master He is! Despite our weakness and failure, if we will (rededicate ourselves with the “steadfast mind” of Ruth or the courage of Joshua, He will add His own enabling power as He promised to the Psalmist, “Wait on the LORD ... and He shall strengthen (the same word as steadfast, courage) thine heart” (Psalm 27:14 AV). Christian disciple, will you bow your will, resolve courageously here and now that you will live for your Saviour and Lord? Then, praise His Name, He Himself will strengthen that commitment.

Take up thy cross; let not its weight  
Fill thy weak soul with vain alarm;  
His strength shall bear thy spirit up,  
And brace thine heart, and nerve thine arm.

### **Ittai's Example**

By a combination of naked aggression and subsequent show of subtle goodwill, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. Such was his eventual popularity that David had to leave Jerusalem. Rejected by his own people, the rightful king made his way over the Kidron and out of the city. Hundreds of years later, his son and Lord was to cross the same brook, likewise rejected and disowned. They both had had their triumphs and they both took with them a comparatively small band of faithful followers, willing hearted but weak in the flesh.

Within hours, they both were to endure shameful abuse. Not that the insults, mud and stones that Shimei hurled at David bear any comparison with the shame heaped upon his Lord. Abishai would have done to Shimei what Peter tried clumsily to do to Malchus, but David had some of the gracious restraint that was to be so perfectly exemplified in the Saviour. Among David's followers was a recruit from Oath, named Ittai. Without wishing to discourage him, the warrior king faced his loyal follower with the challenging cost, “Wherefore goest thou also with us? Return, and abide with the king... whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us, seeing I go whither I may?” (2 Samuel 15:19,20).

How did the loyal recruit react? The place of safety and easy life was definitely back in the city with the newly-appointed, yet usurping, king. In contrast, loyalty to the man “outside the camp” meant hardship and difficulty. Ittai didn't waver. His decision was made, his dedication was total. “As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth,

surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, even there also will thy servant be” (2 Samuel 15:21).

### **The Supreme Example**

In chapter 6:8, Isaiah responded to the question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” by his willing declaration, “Here am I, send me”. Isaiah had seen the glory of the One who in the counsels of deity long before made a similar commitment. The Son of God was dedicated to the total fulfilment of the Father’s will to redeem mankind. That dedication can be traced in unfaltering tread down through law and prophet, psalm and proverb and across the gospel scrolls. The Man whose “legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold” is consecrated in His purpose.

With deep awe and with a sincere prayer to be positively influenced by the review, we briefly retrace the life of Him whose feet, “like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a fire”, have left their indelible footprints burnt into the scriptural record. “Wherefore when He cometh into the world, He saith ... Lo, I am come ... to do Thy will, O God” (Hebrews 10:5,7). That sense of purpose re-emerges when, in the first record of His spoken words, He declares, “I must be about My Father’s business” (Luke 2:49 RVM). This compelling necessity to dedicate His life to His Father’s will runs like a golden strand through the gospel records. “I must preach suffer ... walk ... work ... be lifted up ... be rejected ... killed and ... rise again”. He who is from the beginning ever has the end in view. Nothing, no one, will divert Him from this sacred purpose. He is the consecrated Christ.

Tired, hungry and thirsty, He must go through Samaria and, though pressed by His disciples to eat, He declared His predominant purpose “to do the will of Him that sent Me” (John 4:34). As He unveils to His disciples that He “must go ... suffer ... be killed ... be raised up” (Matthew 16:21), Peter’s well intentioned, but misguided, protests are sternly dismissed. When the Pharisees try to send Him out of Jerusalem because of Herod’s death threat, the Lord insists with equal emphasis, “Go and say to that fox ... I must go on My way today and tomorrow and the day following” (Luke 13:31-33). And so the Lord’s decision and dedication brought Him “outside the camp” from where, once more, He calls, “Come follow Me”.

I heard His call:

Come! Follow! That was all.

My gold grew dim,

My heart went after Him.

I rose; I followed; That was all.

Who would not follow if they heard His call?



## **CHAPTER FOUR: WORSHIPPING TOGETHER**

Before the risen Christ finally departed from His loved disciples, He gave them clear instructions, “Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations “... teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you.”

Note that His instructions apply to all parts of the globe: it is His wish that one universal pattern shall be adopted. In Matthew 28:18-20, where this instruction is given, no details occur, but the essence of what the Lord taught in the post-resurrection forty days is found in the apostles’ practice after His ascension, that is in the Acts and the Epistles. But the Matthew passage does put the emphasis in the right place, for He said, “Make disciples” which involves obedience. In the previous chapter, obedience in baptism was considered: in this chapter, obedience in worshipping together is the theme.

### **Together for Breaking Bread**

The “togetherness” of the disciples in Jerusalem is quite a feature of the record in the early chapters of the Acts. Prior to Pentecost, 120 were together, fulfilling the Lord’s specific request, “tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). On the day of Pentecost three thousand were added to those already together, to become the first Church of God in New Testament times, and the Lord “added to them day by day those that were being saved” (Acts 2:47). And what did they do after they were baptized? They “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). These principles continued to be applied when, by persecution, the disciples moved out from Jerusalem to other cities.

The apostles’ teaching: where did it originate? The answer is, with the Lord Himself. He taught the apostles, apart from Paul, during the forty days referred to above. Paul also obtained it directly from the Lord, probably during his three years in Arabia (Galatians 1:12-18). What Paul received agreed exactly with what the other apostles received: the instructions were consistent.

How often did they meet to break bread? Acts 20:7 gives the answer, “And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread...” That this was general among the churches of God is confirmed by 1 Corinthians 16:2 where collections are discussed. “Upon the first day of the week let each one of you lay by him in store”. That is, when they were gathered together to break bread, at that time also collections were taken.

### **Breaking of Bread as a Remembrance of the Lord**

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 makes it clear that, when the disciples came together in church capacity for the breaking of bread, it was to fulfil the Lord's own request on the night of His betrayal, "this do in remembrance of Me". The bread and the wine were not to satisfy hunger and thirst but were partaken of as an act of remembrance of the One who died for them.

### **Breaking of Bread leads to Worship**

In remembering what the Lord has done, the feelings of disciples are drawn out to give God praise. In this way worship flows spontaneously from remembrance. Now Hebrews 10:19-25, written in the context of "the assembling of yourselves together" in church capacity, indicates a further feature which many dear Christians have missed entirely, namely that on such an occasion the heavenly holy place is entered into by faith, through Him who is "a great Priest over the house of God" (v.21).

It is the declared purpose of God that each church of God "fitly framed together" should grow into a "holy temple in the Lord" (Ephesians 2:21), so forming the house of God, over which the risen Christ is the High Priest (Hebrews 3:1). In 1 Peter 2:5, this house is described as a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. This divinely appointed pattern of worshipping together is clearly outlined in Scripture: a careful study will reveal that no collective worship is discussed outside this framework. Therefore it should be the aim of today's disciples, who wish to please their Lord in the fullest sense, to be found worshipping together according to the same pattern.

### **Departures from the Divine Path**

No authority is found in Scripture for the practice of taking "holy communion" other than at weekly intervals or other than on the first day of the week. Similarly, no authority is found in Scripture for the practice of the taking of the bread and wine by individuals, however much some may seek to justify it in terms of appreciation by the individuals. In the Bible it is exclusively a function of a gathered together people.

We do not wish to infer that in any of these departures from the divine pattern sincere people do not worship or that God, in His infinite grace, gets nothing from their worship. However, if God through His Holy Spirit has taken pains to reveal His desired practice in His Word, the least disciples can do is to find out that practice and then put it into effect. It is submitted that this is scripturally done in the framework of churches of God operating as the house of God.

### **The prayers**

The prayers, that is collective prayer in a church of God, are included in Acts 2:42, as well as the breaking of bread. Now Hebrews 4:14-16 describes that activity of the great High Priest as the Churches of God draws near with boldness to the throne of grace. He it is who has been tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin, and who is available to provide grace and strength to His people in time of need. Such an exercise by the church will be in a spirit of reverence and Godly fear: prostration of spirit, which is worship, is also likely to result.

Always in Scripture, the High Priest is associated with a collective people. This does not mean that individuals have no access to the divine throne, but in that context the Spirit speaks of the Advocate, as in 1 John 2:1. An advocate is one called alongside to help and we should, as individuals, take full advantage of this marvellous facility.

### Ecumenism

Under the banner of “worshipping together” many Christians are striving for a oneness through the Ecumenical movement, by bringing different denominations together in combined services, with the hope that gradually differences will be resolved. They quote the words of the Lord Jesus from John 17:22-23 “that they may be one, even as we are one”. This aim of the Lord, however, is only achieved on the basis of His Word, which He had given to the disciples (vv. 8,14) and which is an essential pre-requisite to unity. If each denomination went back to what the Lord gave to His disciples then there would be a true basis for unity, and denominations would disappear. All would be worshipping together in the way He had prescribed and in strict accord with His commandments.

The New Testament gives the impression that the apostles proceeded from Pentecost with clarity of concept and a unified purpose. The resurrected Christ, who alone has all authority in heaven and earth (Matthew 28:18) gave them a crystal clear remit. Not only was there just one gospel (Galatians 1:8-9) but also one Faith and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). Every encouragement was given by the apostles to believers to “attain to the Unity of the Faith” (Ephesians 4:13). The Faith was that body of teaching received from the Lord and passed on to the disciples without amendment. It was that for which they were to “contend earnestly” (Jude 3). It was also called the Truth (1 Timothy 2:4).

As under the Old Covenant God allowed of no alternative to His Law of Worship, so in the New Testament, a pattern has been laid down for which no substitutes are envisaged. May God give grace to each, “for if any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching” (John 7:17) were the words of the Lord Himself.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: THE REMEMBRANCE**

They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).

The Remembrance is the name we give to the Breaking of Bread. We do so because the Master who gave the ceremony gave it to His disciples as a memorial. He said, "This do in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). The Remembrance then is a ceremony instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ by which disciples gather together at His command to remember Him.

Remembrance is a very important aspect of life. It enables us to bring to mind, concerning someone absent from us, the character and virtue of that person, how he behaved among us, what he said, what he did and how it all affected us. So Christ, by means of His abounding grace, gave this ceremony in order that His disciples in every age, longing to see Him, might gather together on earth under His authority to remember Him. Precious as may be our remembrance of His words or His deeds, more precious still is our remembrance of Himself.

### **The Institution of the Remembrance: The Beginning**

It happened first in Jerusalem in a large furnished room which the Lord called 'My guest chamber'. Evidently the man who owned the house had met Jesus and knew Him. He also would appear to have been a recent friend of the Master who, like Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, came out of the shadows in the service of the Lord. It was His purpose to keep the passover in this room with His disciples, and this they did. The passover, so often discarded by unfaithful Israel, was an annual remembrance of their redemption from Egypt, shortly to give way to a much more precious remembrance.

The Lord knew that His work on earth would soon be completed and that He would return to heaven. He would leave with His disciples teaching to regulate their lives, conduct and spiritual vision. He would send the Holy Spirit whose indwelling and enabling power would fit them to carry it out. Central to their service together was to be the Breaking of the Bread, the precious remembrance of their Lord. At the passover supper therefore He did something new and arresting. What He did was very simple, but the meaning was profound.

### **The Recipients**

Those present in "the Upper Room" were the Lord and His disciples. The Lord instituted

the memorial quietly and suddenly to the considerable interest, no doubt, of His faithful disciples. They caught every word and noticed every act. No formalism or casual attitude! Let us remember that the ceremony and the commandment were given, not to the world at large nor to fruitless Israel nor to any incidental group of men not having His teaching, but to faithful disciples, having been taught in and having become obedient to His Word. We set this over against the multiplicity of elaborate “communion” services organized by men, and we see their error.

### **The Ceremony**

The Lord observed the passover supper and then took a loaf (Revised Version Margin). He gave thanks to God in the presence of the disciples, after which He broke the loaf and gave it to them. He said, “This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). Was the bread then His actual body as the Church of Rome teach? We believe not. When the Lord said “I am the door” He was illustrating graphically to His audience that He was the means by which men enter into the possession of eternal life. In symbol therefore He is “the door”. The loaf likewise is a symbol of His body. When something is broken it is wholly given, and in the breaking of the loaf there is clear instruction that He gave Himself wholly at Calvary.

Next He took a cup of wine and when, similarly, He had given thanks He gave it to the disciples saying, among other words recorded, “This is My blood of the covenant which is shed for many” (Mark 14:24). They all drank of it. The poured out cup symbolizes the blood of Christ by which the New Covenant has been ratified, bringing eternal blessing to men. Marvellous thought! It is not dependent upon us in any way.

### **The Significance of the Remembrance To the Life of the Disciple**

The ceremony of the Breaking of Bread is central in the Lord’s teaching concerning the kingdom of God. We need not be surprised when the purpose was that disciples might remember their Lord and “proclaim the Lord’s death till He come” (1 Corinthians 11:26). It is of course a command of our Lord to His disciples. Its importance is further emphasized when Paul by the Spirit says, “I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread” (1 Corinthians 11:23).

In that passage Paul speaks of Him always as the Lord, emphasizing the authority which is His and under which we gladly serve Him. By its importance it became, it seems, the first collective act of service in the week of the early disciples (Acts 20:7) and it was

something in which they “continued steadfastly” (Acts 2:42). We can readily imagine the heart-warming exercise this would be for the disciples who loved their Lord. Without doubt this would produce a spirit of true worship and praise. So it should ever be.

The letters Paul wrote to the Church of God in Corinth abound with exhortation as to the conduct and behaviour of God’s people in a church of God. The Breaking of Bread is spoken of at length, emphasizing its importance, purpose and solemnity. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 it is spoken of as “a communion”. So in the Breaking of Bread we share together in the blessed realization of who Christ is and of what He has done through His atoning death.

### **The Spiritual Significance**

The collective worship of God’s people finds its source in the Breaking of Bread. In respect of collective worship based upon the sacrifice of Christ, the writer to the Hebrews opens up something very precious (Hebrews 10:19-25). In spirit we enter into God’s holy place in heaven and draw near at His invitation to offer our sacrifice of worship and praise. Man cannot have direct access to God, so we come through Christ, our Great High Priest. What a marvel this is! What a wonderful privilege to come with boldness, resting in His work! What sobering responsibility since He has invited us! Can we ever be lacking in interest?

Some Christians teach from Matthew 18:20 that a few of them may meet casually to break bread and that, to such gatherings, Christ comes down from heaven to be present to bless. This we believe to be a misinterpretation of scripture. Matthew 18:20 is not at all a basis for Christian gathering as the context of the passage explains. Matthew 18:15-20 has to do with church discipline under Christ’s authority where the church is taking action in regard to one of its number. Christ then is present to ratify the action in full fellowship with His own. Our preparation and presentation to God, who has revealed Himself to us in the day of His grace as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (See 1 Peter 1:3 etc.) and has given us every blessing in Christ, allows us, through eternal love, to give to Him in worship.

We can never therefore give Him less than the best, carefully prepared thoughts set in order. ‘I speak the things which I have made touching the King’ (Psalm 45:1). This emerges from an overflowing heart. The things that are made are things we toil over. Preparation is essential. In our case this means meditation on the Person and work of Christ. Our aim must be to consider Him daily so as to present Him to God on the first day of the week. He is the poorer who feeds only upon the thoughts of others. He is rich who

quietly waits to hear through God's Holy Spirit what He discloses to us of Christ from His Word.

Our remembrance is of One who said, "I come again". When that day dawns remembrance will be over; We shall be with Him. In the meantime let us be diligent to keep His commandment and so to "proclaim the Lord's death till He come" (1 Corinthians 11:26) – "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the custom of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day drawing nigh" (Hebrews 10:25).

## **CHAPTER SIX: UNSWERVING DEVOTION**

A young man was recently referred to as “a Christian athlete”, that is, he was an athlete who professed to be a Christian. But all Christians are athletes - or should be - for the scripture says, “let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

### **Motivation**

Athletes, especially long-distance runners, need many qualities including motivation, energy and endurance. Motivation is our present theme. King Hezekiah was a marvellous example for us, for it was said of him, “he held fast to the LORD and did not cease to follow Him ... and the LORD was with him; he was successful in whatever he undertook” (2 Kings 18:6,7 NIV). Oh, that such words could be said of us!

When he was thirty-nine Hezekiah thought he was going to die, and reviewing his life, he could say in all sincerity to the Lord, “I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion” (2 Kings 20:3 NW). Yes, “wholehearted devotion” to the Lord, unswerving, never turning aside from following Him in loving response for all that He has done for us, that surely is needed first and foremost as we seek to “run the straight race”. We admire this quality as we see it in the lives of fellow Christians who inspire us. May we not be too discouraged if we feel a certain lack of it in ourselves, but rather be encouraged as we further pursue our meditation.

The successful runner sets his mind on breaking the finishing tape; that is his goal and he stretches every nerve and muscle to accomplish that. Paul speaks of this in Christian experience: stretching forward to the things that are before, I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13,14).

So the Christian is not only motivated by present devotion to the Lord, but also by the certain and glorious prospect of meeting Christ, and hopefully receiving a wonderful prize from Him. It isn't selfishness to go in eagerly for such a prize if we are deeply moved and spurred on at the thought of the pleasure that will be His to give those marvellous rewards to all those who by their life-style say, “I love you Lord”.

### **Unfailing Love**

Individual experiences and responses to problems in discipleship vary enormously. Some people start the race with great enthusiasm then fade and falter later on. Some make very unpromising starts yet finish well, and others plod on steadily from the first and “keep right on to the end of the road”. Some have turned aside and later been graciously restored



to the track; sadly some have left the track never to return. What is the secret of running well? Surely the answer is LOVE.

“Love suffereth long ... beareth all things ... endureth all things. Love never faileth” (1 Corinthians 13:4,7,8). Such love is firstly love to the Lord, then love to others for His sake.

### **Looking unto Jesus**

Our love to the Lord is deepened and strengthened as we intensify our gaze on Him, as the runner fixes his eye on the tape. That's why we are told that as we are running we are to be: “looking unto Jesus the Author and Perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross” (Hebrews 12:2).

Because of moral pollution it was vital for first century Christians to keep the gaze of faith and love firmly focused on Christ. If the world of early Christians tended to pollution, what shall we say of ours today? Surely it's no better and its processes of depravity are far more numerous and sophisticated. So we constantly need to tear our eyes away from the corruption around and focus our minds and hearts on Christ: We can think of Him in glory now, looking down upon us and pleading for us, and we can also look to Him as our supreme Example, keeping faithfully to the track, in deep devotion to His father, and in wonderful, personal love for you and me.

It was a lonely path He trod,  
From every human soul apart;  
Known only to Himself and God  
Was all the grief that filed His heart,  
Yet from the track He turned not back  
Till, where I lay in want and shame,  
He found me. Blessed be His Name!

Surely, as we gaze upon our Lord, His unswerving devotion fills our hearts with admiration, love and gratitude; and we pledge that with His help we will go on steadfastly for Him and, most precious, toward Him. The unswerving devotion we wish to encourage our hearts in is no vague mystical experience. We would suggest that it falls into two broad categories: personal and collective.

On the personal level, we learn that our devotion to the Lord is bound up with our trust in Him and our obedience to Him. These come through knowing Him and His will for us. Such knowledge develops primarily through communion with Him in daily Bible

meditation and prayer. How vital that we keep these daily appointments with God even though at times we do not find it easy. Such communion is then to be translated into a way of living, in positive, faithful witness for Christ: In this way we learn to run the race in daily stages, knowing that perhaps today we shall finish the course and see Jesus face-to-face for the first time.

There can be no substitute for personal, devotional Christianity, but having said this, the New Testament does not cater for Christians “going it alone”, like solitary joggers who are seen on many roads today. Nor does Scripture present a free and easy casual Christian fellowship. On the contrary, a clear track is marked out for disciples to run in parallel together; in which they are to continue in devotion and service for the Lord.

The starter’s gun was fired, as it were, on the day of Pentecost when three thousand people joined in this race. The following words are familiar to many, but we stress them again because if we are sincerely seeking to be unswerving in our devotion, we shall heed them and seek to follow the example set: It says of those who believed that they were baptized and added and they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts 2:42).

The activities referred to in this verse are collective and none can be neglected without swerving from the track (we are not of course referring to enforced absence or isolation). It was necessary for the writer to the Hebrew Christians to remind them of their collective responsibilities in these things:

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess ... Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:23, 25 NIV).

So the personal, devotional life is not complete without entering enthusiastically into the privileges and responsibilities of collective service in churches of God, and conversely, Christianity isn’t simply a matter of going to church meetings. Unswerving devotion demands togetherness in the confines of a clearly marked out track, and scriptural togetherness demands personal, unswerving devotion to Christ.

Oh, draw me, Saviour, after Thee!

So shall I run and never tire;

With gracious words still comfort me,

Be Thou my hope, my sole desire,

Free me from every weight. Nor fear

Nor sin can come if Thou art near.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: UNITY NOT UNIFORMITY

Imagine, for a moment, that we are privileged to observe one of the early Remembrances of the first Church of God in Jerusalem. Filing in through the open doorway there comes a steady stream of people, some of whose former or present professions we can recall: a fisherman, a tax collector... In this same circle of men and women gathered to break bread, we find both impulsive Peter and reflective John. This unlikely assortment of men and women, from very different walks of life, have been fused together by the Holy Spirit to form the first local New Testament church of God.

Unity, but not uniformity, so it is with God and His ways. One God, but three distinct Persons forming the Godhead. Each Person with a different role, blending perfectly in one overall harmony of purpose. For example, the decision: “let us make man in Our image” (Genesis 1:26) was the agreed result of a conference within the Godhead itself. It was a decision involving distinct responsibilities for each Person of the Trinity. And today, men and women still show something of the divine image as they give expression to their creative abilities. Though not always expressed to the glory of God, what a wealth of talent is displayed in terms of inventive research, literature, art, music and handiwork. These diverse forms together reveal a basic creativity reflecting the divine image. Our created environment is a “universe”, but what staggering variety! Truly, “star differs from star in splendour” (1 Corinthians 15:41).

A literal rendering of Proverbs 22:6 might be “train up a child according to his way”. The word “way” here is interesting. It basically comes from the idea “to set foot on”. The corresponding verb is used in Psalm 7:12, and the picture is one of putting a foot on a bow in order to shape it for stringing. So the word “way” carries the thought of the shaping of our individual personality, prescribed according to God’s predetermined pattern. The training has to take into account the individual traits of the child concerned, for we are all different. Amid such non-uniformity of talent, background and personality at Jerusalem, only a common submission to the authority of the Word of God could bring about the unity God desired, and which the Lord Jesus Himself had prayed for in John 17. God’s Word was, similarly, the basis for the unity of the disciples gathered together at Philippi. Here, the first European believers no doubt included a certain jailer and also a certain successful business-woman (Acts 16:14,34). It would not have been a natural association.

Multi-racial New Testament churches, whether predominantly Jewish or Gentile, were themselves linked together into a unity with all other such churches of God, irrespective of variations in geographical or cultural settings. (See, for example, 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 2

Corinthians 1:1 showing that the local church was linked with others elsewhere). What was it that ensured their unity as a fellowship of churches, so that Paul could view them collectively as rising “to become a holy temple” (Ephesians 2:21), and Peter could use the equivalent description of a “spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5)? Clearly, it was because they were united by one teaching (1 Corinthians 4:17), one practice (1 Corinthians 11:16), and one elderhood (see Acts 14:23; Acts 15:6). Each believer in this unity had been saved, then baptized by immersion as a disciple, following which they had devoted themselves to obeying the Lord’s commands as taught by the apostles (Acts 2:41,42; 1:2). It is helpful to think about the significance of an identical progression of events narrated in Exodus chapters 12,14 and 24. Such a study will help us to have a deeper conviction of the definite pattern of discipleship today.

God’s delight in, and prescription for, unity among a people serving Him are both to be seen in Psalm 133. Such diverse things mentioned there as the head, beard and collar are all viewed as being united by the anointing oil on its downward flow. This oil, in terms of its chief ingredient, olive oil, consistently throughout the Bible represents the Holy Spirit: Similarly there, the dew, associated with the teaching of God’s Word in Deuteronomy 32:2, unites Hermon in the north with the south of the country. The river Jordan brings water down from Hermon to the mountains of Zion. We get a remarkable illustration of this prescription at a church leaders’ meeting in Acts 15: a difficulty in one church was to be resolved for all. The Word of God had its place (v.16), and the will of the Holy Spirit was paramount (v.28). The result was unity, despite individual differences having been ventilated (v.7). Must not the churches have been refreshed, and must there not also have been a fragrance for God who takes pleasure in the unity which the Spirit effects on the basis of His Word?

Yet, in this unity of disciples which we have emphasized, we can see legitimate differences within the overall framework of the pattern. Let us look together at two of them.

Firstly, there were clearly differences in spiritual gifts and functions. First Corinthians chapter twelve highlights for us this diversity in unity. The argument here is taken from the different functions of the different parts of the human body. Each member of Christ’s Body has been personally gifted, and these gifts are to find their complementary expressions in the divinely designed setting of a local church of God, as at Corinth.

Secondly, there is such a thing as differing legitimate Christian behaviour. Please see Romans, chapter fourteen. There, different, but equally valid forms of behaviour are

discussed. A particular course of action may well be personally legitimate before the Lord, but then there is the matter of its effect on others who observe. We are free in Christ, and that includes being free not to exercise our personal rights. In the issue of first Corinthians chapter ten, the advice is given: “whether you eat or drink ...” (that is non-uniformity) “do it all for the glory of God” (there is the unity). So, in the area of conduct we need to be careful about adopting invariable rules. Our goal is not the uniformity of legalism, but rather the unity of heart which yields to the Lord in varying circumstances.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: STAYING POWER

James, Peter, John, Andrew and the rest of the Eleven - “Ye are they that have continued with Me in My temptations”. These were real men, men who never went back. Not like some “who went back, and walked no more with Him” how the Lord felt their defection!

One old brother in Northern Ireland said before he died, “I have not done much, but at least I have continued”. Did he say, “At least”? “At least!” Certainly that is something the Lord will reward in a coming day. Continue brother, sister, old or young, continue. Be like the Eleven. These were men, great men, men who continued and never went back, and who rejoiced the heart of the Lord.

“Would ye also go away?” It’s the Lord who speaks, who asks the question and it’s for you and me to answer with all our heart, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life”. In the grace and mercy of God we were drawn to the Lord Jesus and persuaded (but not forced) by the Spirit of God to believe on Him and so we were saved by the grace of Christ:

We had to make that decision. Since that day - be it recent or distant God has encouraged us to follow the Lord Jesus, to be obedient to His teaching, that is, the apostles’ teaching, but again He does not compel us. He looks for thankful and willing-hearted believers who want to be obedient to the teaching of the Lord Jesus. How does He encourage? God Himself says to us “I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee”; so that with good courage we are each enabled to say, “The Lord is my Helper; I will not fear: what shall man do unto me?” and the Lord Jesus says to us (as He did to Paul), “My grace is sufficient for thee: for My power is made perfect in weakness”. It is surely a word for weak ones like you and me. “My power is made perfect in weakness!” How much of Naaman there is in us. “I thought ...” But as high as the heavens are above the earth so high are God’s ways above our ways.

Paul was perhaps the greatest disciple of the Lord Jesus and he felt his need, his weaknesses, and on hearing the Lord’s reply he gloried in his weaknesses that the power of Christ might rest upon Him. Years ago I heard of two poor women who called at a farmhouse. One was the chief speaker and she catalogued her misfortunes to the farmer’s wife. But at the mention of each misfortune the other woman would interject, “Me, too!” We also can surely say with Paul as he glories in his weaknesses that the power of Christ may rest upon him, “Me, too!” Rejoice, brother or sister, Rejoice that such grace is available to us also. We are weak, but He is mighty.

God in His infinite wisdom has left us to serve Him with a mortal body and while we are in this body we shall experience temptations - the temptations to do the evil things that belong to that old corrupt fleshly nature (they are listed for us by the Lord in Mark 7:20-23); and the temptations that come from the Devil - all conspiring together to get us down, make us feel, "I'm no use," and give up. We all know the feelings, brother, sister! But by the grace of Christ we continue, and each of us has to learn the lesson (why is it that most of us have to learn the hard way?) not to trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. The Lord Jesus says so plainly, "Abide in Me ... for apart from Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). How do I abide in Him? It's not by learning some mysterious secret formula only comprehensible to the highly gifted. No, He speaks plainly and simply to us "babes" (Matthew 11:25). Personally I am glad that the Lord called us babes, meaning that we are simple enough to believe Him and trust Him. But to return to our question: How do I abide in Him? Hear what the Lord Himself answers:

"If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love ... This is My commandment, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 15:10,12). Does that include loving the brother or sister who rubs me the wrong way, who gets under my skin? John the apostle answers:

"God is LOVE; and he that abideth in love abideth in God, and God abideth in him ... We love because He first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:16,19,20,21).

Love is of God and love never fails. God', speaking through Peter, lists a number of Christian virtues which add up to LOVE, and He says:

"If these things are yours and abound, they make you to be not idle nor unfruitful unto the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ... If ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8,10,11).

But we speak of LOVE - not the sentimental or erotic thing called love by the world. The LOVE that we speak of, which is to characterize you and me and keep us abiding in Christ, suffers long and is kind, envies not, vaunts not itself, is not puffed up. Does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not its own, is not provoked, takes not account of evil (1 Corinthians 13:4,5). "Oh stop!" you say, "It is too much! I just cannot do it" No, of course: you cannot in your own strength, but in the power of Christ you can. You can do all things



in Him who strengthens you. Abide in Me, the Lord Jesus says.

God gives us every encouragement and has made full provision in Christ to enable each of us to continue, to finish the course, but He expects each of us to make an effort, and He uses various words in the Scriptures to remind us that we must make an effort in our service for God. Disaster comes to the idle. Perdition! The word almost sends a shiver through you. The opportunity of a life of service (not the believers' eternal life) for the Lord who died for us - lost! That is what is involved in shrinking back unto perdition. The Lord says, "Exercise thyself", "Be diligent", "Hold fast", "Give heed", "Strive", "Fight", "Quit yourself like a man". You and I make the effort and God supplies the strength - marvellous! And at the end of the day He rewards; rewards each one who makes the effort to live for Him! And He gives the grace to enable us to do so!

How humble we ought to be in His service. Proud sinners do not get saved and proud believers do not serve Him acceptably. In the home, at work, at school, college, among relatives and neighbours, and in the local assembly let the love of Christ constrain us. Ask for the grace to love in the name of Jesus and it will be given you. Love never fails. "This is the way, walk ye in it". Never let any of these sorrowful words be applied to any one of us: "drift away", "go away", "fall away", "shrink back", but rather let us each paraphrase the words of one of old, "Thine am I, Lord Jesus, and on Thy side, Thou King of love".

## **CHAPTER NINE: PRAYING POWER**

Prayer is an absolutely vital part of the believer's life, whether that person be newly saved or long experienced in service for Christ.

When Ananias, an early disciple residing at Damascus, was instructed to visit a certain house where newly converted Saul of Tarsus was, he was told by the Lord that he would find him praying (Acts 9:10,11). Prayer is an expression of dependence and reliance upon God. The men of Judah prevailed against their enemies because "they cried unto the LORD" and "they relied upon the LORD" (2 Chronicles 13:14,18). Victory is assured when the prayer of faith is uttered.

### **Private Prayer**

In the Gospels the Lord Jesus gave two lessons on prayer: (i) Matthew 6:5-13 and (ii) Luke 11:1-3. He sets before His followers principles of private and public prayer. Verses 5 and 7 of the former passage give specific instructions on what not to do, while verse 6 shows what is to be done privately. Praying must not be done hypocritically, choosing to let others see the exercise, as if to gain attention and approval. Prayer is for the ear of God; only He can give the answers. Neither should there be copying what others say, nor multiplying empty words or phrases, as if to impress. The Lord is not objecting to repetition, He did so Himself - "saying again the same words" (Matthew 26:44). His repetitions were accompanied with earnest pleading and intense agony, especially on this occasion in anticipation of Golgotha.

The profitable way is to enter a "secret place" of private exercise, the store-room - the place of cherished experiences. Here we are not seen by others, the opposite of that practised in verse 5. No four-walled room is necessary; it can be a hilltop (Matthew 14:23); an isolated, quiet area (Luke 5:16), even a garden. That is where the Father hears and replies.

### **Public Exercise**

Matthew 6:9-13 is a model prayer, not to be repeated word for word, but "after this manner". It is a pattern, nothing more. Remarkable in its brevity, perfect in its orderliness. Firstly, calling upon God's Person; secondly three expressions exalting His Name; thirdly four statements expressing human needs. His interests take priority (Thy Name ... Thy kingdom ... Thy will ...); others and ours are secondary. When He is put first in prayer, power will follow. Real communion with Him will enable realization of our need and His nearness.

The plural “ye” is in Luke 11:12. The meaning of the Greek word translated as “say” is “to give oral expression” or “to utter definite words”. The passage contains the example of corporate prayer and more particularly in church gatherings. More time is to be spent praying privately than when doing so with others. Thus did the Lord leave the example by spending whole nights in prayer along with His Father (Luke 6:12). “Say” includes the thought that prayers should be vocal and heard by all so others may understand and add the Amen (1 Corinthians 14:16).

The attitude should not be slovenly or casual, but the words should be carefully chosen. Only the men are authorized to pray in the assembly meetings (1 Timothy 2:8). Womenfolk can pray silently (like Hannah who “spoke in her heart” in 1 Samuel 1:13). Brethren in a church of God should all be exercised to pray audibly, no matter their age or experience. The time, of course, may not always permit everyone present participating audibly. Petitions should be usually short (less than a minute in Luke 11) and to the point.

Acts 12:5,12 present a fine example of dedicated and answered prayer. A crisis had developed, an apostle slain, another imprisoned. What could be done? The only recourse - prayer. Prayer was made by the church - not by some but all. Earnestly (same word as in Luke 22:44) they invoked the Lord’s help. They were sincere, fervent, succinct and serious in their exercises, privately and collectively. So should it always be. “Importunity” in Luke 11:8 is literally “without shame”. Never be ashamed to pray. It is the power factor in an assembly or individual life. The power of the people of God and the servant of God will be directly proportionate to the activity in prayer.

### **What for, When, and How to Pray**

What is prayer? It is asking, seeking, knocking (Luke 11:9). The Lord Himself is found praying in verse 1. Did he need to? He prayed as a Man dependent upon His God, as a Servant upon His Master, as a Son to His Father. Prayer is not only pleading, but pleasing - it is talking with God and enjoying His presence. That was the Lord’s continual experience, the rich joy and boundless pleasure of communing with His God and Father. “When” (v.2) indicates frequency, not just when need arises. “Our” and “us” emphasizes unselfishness. Pray for others before yourself. This is fellowship in prayer. “Let us ... come boldly” (Hebrews 4:16).

Persistence in prayer is a requirement. Never give up. Importunity will result in opportunity. “Ask” implies audible exercise; “seek” is indicative of constant exercise for direction; “knock” conveys the quest for opportunity to glorify God. These must be in line with God’s will. His answers might not always be what we wanted or expected. They will

be beneficial. In the illustrations of the loaves, fish and egg of Luke 11:5,11,12 the right things were requested. Sometimes the wrong things can be asked for, be certain of this, the Lord will never dispense what is harmful (stone, serpent or scorpion).

The answer to the question of what we ask for is given in verse 13. The secret of power for prayer is the Holy Spirit. Not asking Him to indwell, but rather to work and operate in our lives. The One who inhabits each person at conversion is to influence our actions. He guides, controls and directs our prayer-burdens (Romans 8:26).

Prayer is never to become a formality. It is a real exercise, accompanied by thanksgiving (Romans 1:8,9). Zeal, continuity and determination are to characterize “breathings” before the Lord. We have every right to ask others to pray for us (Colossians 4:3). Prayer is to be always in faith (James 1:6). Doubting has to have no place. The prayer-life of the believer is never to be mediocre. Watching (for dangers) and working (labouring for the Lord) are to be blended with prayer (Nehemiah 4:9,21). These are three main ingredients of successful Christian life. Communion with the Lord produces dramatic effects despite hindrances and discouragements. It all starts with prayer. However, remember that this is no substitute for action. It is its precursor. It is not an excuse for not working.

Pray for all men (1 Timothy 2:1) not without exception, for example, purveyors of evil, save to pray for their deliverance from it, but without distinction of race or background. Prayer is a weapon not of the flesh but of the Spirit, with immense power resulting from its use to resist sin (2 Corinthians 10:4,5). The battle against false teaching is not by physical assault nor firstly by argument, but firstly by prayer. It is a sacred duty, not an option. “Love in need, appealing to Love in power”.

Pray in the Holy Spirit, intelligently, reverently and discerningly by virtue of realized intimacy with God. By application of the life to prayer there will be cultivated an appetite and taste for God’s Word, and an outcome of Spirit-power. **PRAY ON!**

## CHAPTER TEN: MANAGING YOURSELF

Surely one of the most startling truths about the Christian life is that “Ye are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19). Nevertheless it is so. God forgives us our sins on our putting faith in His Son and the redeeming blood of His Cross.

This is the price He paid that we might be loosed from our sins. We have been purchased and we belong to Him by a wonderful transaction of love. Now the Lord did not only purchase our souls for eternity, He also purchased our lives here and now. He gave us His Holy Spirit to indwell our bodies, so we are urged to “glorify God therefore in your body” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

As disciples of the Lord Jesus we should not be simply pleasing ourselves for the reason that we do not own ourselves. Another does, and on being baptized as believers, we declare that we are now “dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11).

The challenge comes in the daily Christian walk. Self-management is not automatic. The Christian disciple is a steward taking care of something on behalf of the true owner. That simply means that we are stewards of our lives on behalf of the Lord Jesus, and He requires us to manage our lives accordingly for His sake.

The Lord Himself is our Example, for “Christ also pleased not Himself” (Romans 15:3). So we should not allow self-interest to hijack our life for the Lord. Today’s philosophy is to “do your own thing”. The very thought of self-denial or of obligation to another would in many circles be laughable. The Christian is unquestionably at odds with the spirit of the age, for he or she belongs to a different Master.

Self-denial and self-discipline are outdated concepts in western society, but the Scriptures clearly point us this way if we are to serve the Lord acceptably. We should learn from Him who pleased His Father in all things. Daily He drove Himself on, He communed with His Father, He was ceaseless in good works, and whether as a Servant or as the Master He was always in control, managing Himself for the great purpose for which He came.

Now such self-management does not just happen of its own accord in us. The disciple must be wary of dangers and seek the Holy Spirit’s help at every step. Even Paul did not find it easy, but he managed himself so that he might run the race to the end and gain the incorruptible crown. “But I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage” (1 Corinthians 9:27). Let us consider some areas of Christian stewardship in our lives.

## **Our Gifts**

On being indwelt by the Holy Spirit at the moment of receiving Christ, the Spirit graciously gives us a gift and it is our responsibility to foster and to use it correctly to God's glory (1 Corinthians 12:7,11). Our talent or gift is not for random use, or abuse, or for that matter, no use. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14-30 shows the faithless servant as the one who hid his talent, and no profit accrued to His master's benefit. The same will be true if the Christian fails to exercise his or her gift to God's glory.

What might this gift be? Often it may be associated with some form of public ministry, whereas the spiritual talent may be simply the encouraging of others, the word of kindness, teaching the young, hospitality, or the individual testimony of the Christian. Knowing our talent is not enough in itself; it should be managed and returned to God with interest. Know your gift, and exercise it in accordance with God's Word.

## **Our Time**

Surely, this is the consumer of our great intentions. Equally, so often it seems like something to be filled and used up. The Christian watchword is to be vigilant and not to take it easy, or to assume that we will have plenty of time tomorrow. "Boast not thyself of tomorrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1). We all know the problem of the clash of interests within a limited timespan. Pressure of work, or study, domestic chores, desire for some time of relaxation, friendships, travelling, and added to all this somehow we need to squeeze in attendance at the meetings of the church! What about our private prayer and reading times too? In the high pressure society we live in, something has to give. What is it for you? Is it the things of God that give? They shouldn't, yet so often this can be the easy option. Here is where we can learn from the self-discipline of the Lord. In Mark 1:32-34 we see how He healed the sick long into the evening, yet in verse 35: "And in the morning, a great while before day, He rose up and went out, and departed into a desert place, and there prayed."

How early did He get up? How far did He travel to be alone with His Father? How tired was He? How much private prayer have I made today, or this week? Has my private prayer been genuine communion with God, or "putting in my five minutes"?

We are all guilty of misusing time, perhaps by squandering all of our spare time, or by packing the day so full of activity that there is nothing left over for the Lord. Beware of both pitfalls! "I am too busy to pray, read, attend the church meetings", means you need to pray, read and attend the meetings! There is nothing wrong with spare time interests, but

let us keep them in proportion to our time with the Lord. The real answer is the close walk with the Lord, founded on love, His Word abiding in us (John 14:23). If our heart and mind are set on Him, then we will not let time rule us, but we will use it to His glory.

### **Our Money**

The same principle applies. The story of the widow's mite in Mark's gospel makes it clear that God does not look at the amount of money given, but at the exercise of heart, and the degree of self-sacrifice involved. As saints in the Churches of God we have a duty of love towards the work of the Lord, and towards those who have given themselves to the Lord's work. Our givings are vital, but it is this spirit of willing-heartedness which the Lord looks for. Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-8. Cheerful giving is surely what counts. Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:3 explains, "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor... but have not love, it profiteth me nothing". Give with love.

Should we tithe, that is, follow the practice under the law of Moses of giving at least one tenth part of our income to the Lord? For disciples today under grace, we are not obliged to follow this practice (Romans 6:14; Acts 15:24-29), and whether we are able to give more or less than a tenth of our earnings, our givings should be love gifts to the Lord. God's work, however, requires increasing financial resources for all of its many activities, and we should carefully examine our hearts as to whether we are merely giving of our superfluity, or giving to the point of us feeling the effect. We must, of course, pay our bills and feed our families. But can other luxuries wait, or do we need them at all? Is the Lord's work faltering? Are we remembering those in full time service, and their families? Let's bring this matter before the Lord,

### **Our bodies and minds**

Daniel is an excellent example of a man who managed himself in the face of pressure to do what was the in thing. He did not do so in a self-righteous manner, but with resolve founded upon love of God and with simple dignity. When he was expected to eat of the king's table, he "purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself" (Daniel 1:8). His self-management began inside, and from this determination he acted, in this case it was not to do something. Later, when Darius signed the interdict against prayer, Daniel, knowing this to be so, continued to pray to God three times a day (Daniel 6:10). In this case he continued to do something - pray to his God. His routine of regular prayer was not a sham but a discipline of heart and mind visibly carried out.

What we do should come from our heart, and our innermost thoughts should be reflected

in our actions. With Daniel there was no division. To manage our bodies we first need to discipline our minds - what we think about, what we watch, listen to and talk about. The line of the children's chorus is very apt: Watch your eyes, ears, lips, hands and feet.

We all have to hang our heads in shame at past failures, but forgiveness is only a prayer away. The Lord is looking for a real turning away from the old things and a positive turning towards the things which are pleasing to Him.

The Christian who manages himself or herself well is the Christian who dies to self and lives for Christ, who puts to death the thoughts of the flesh and cultivates what is pure. Colossians 3:5 describes the putting to death of the old: "Mortify therefore your members...", whereas Philippians 4:8 describes the cultivating of the new: "whatsoever things are true honourable ... just ... pure ... lovely... of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things". The way we have committed ourselves to walking is opposed to our old nature. To walk steadily along the way, self must die, and He must live in me.



## **CHAPTER ELEVEN: HARMFUL FUN**

We live in a divided world. While many struggle to survive in poorer countries, there is in the richer, more technically advanced, nations an amazing increase in opportunities for many and varied leisure pursuits, entertainment and enjoyment in humour, laughter and relaxation, which is a definition of fun for the purpose of this chapter.

It is neither a virtue nor a fault to find ourselves in one or the other, but God's people who live where the multi-million pound entertainments industries are most concentrated have to learn from the principles in God's word to come to terms with it. There are opportunities to play games, listen to the radio, watch television, visit the cinema, participate in any number of sports (or just enjoy watching), take up a hobby, go dancing, do the lottery, spend an evening at the pub or just sit at home and read a novel. We can eat out, take holidays abroad or go for a walk in the countryside. At the touch of a button there is a wide choice of music available to us from classical to pop and rock. And for disciples of the Lord Jesus these things pose a problem. How much should we enjoy them? Are some of them wrong? Should we shun entertainment or be choosy? Does it depend on how much television I watch or what type of music I like? Or are these things harmful in any quantities or style?

### **Right or Wrong?**

If the Word of God declares any pursuit to be wrong then, of course, we need look no further, and likewise if it is given approval. Drunken carousing and physical exercise provide an example of each (1). But it is not always as simple as that, for there are so many grey areas upon which there is a multitude of opinions but no specific scriptures. Recognizing, however, that all forms of entertainment are "of this world" (not being part of our spiritual service) we need to examine from Scripture what that world really is and to find out what role disciples of the Lord Jesus are expected to have in the world.

One of the meanings of the Greek word kosmos, translated "the world", is "the present condition of human affairs in alienation from and opposition to God" (2). It is to this use of the word that John refers when he states "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (3). Satan is the prince of this world and he stands condemned (4). "But", says Jesus to His disciples, "take heart! I have overcome the world" (5). The Lord Jesus in His death for us at Calvary put an end to Satan's claims upon us and freed us from bondage to this world. No wonder we are told not to love it! (6) Now it is not our Saviour's will that we should be taken out of this world but that we should be protected from the evil one,

and that specifically by our being sanctified (7). That carries the idea of being different: separated to God from evil and of being pure and holy. Only as we appreciate these things can we begin to see the fun of this world in the light of reality. And what we see is a doomed world offering endless entertainment to spiritually bankrupt people who by their very nature are incapable of discerning the spiritual evil by which they are so easily ensnared. That's not to say that it is all bad, but that it is the product of a doomed Satanic system; and that should put us on our guard.

### **Pleasures that Harm**

Having seen the world as a hostile environment we should not be surprised that it provides pleasures that we are to have no part in: "So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking" (8).

They are darkened, whereas disciples of the Lord Jesus are light; they are "separated from the life of God", disciples are bound up in the life of their Saviour. The two are incompatible. "But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed" (9) continued Paul, and that rules out all forms of pornography, even the so-called "soft-porn" which forms the basis of so many films, TV programmes and novels, together with gambling and lotteries in which the motive is acquisitive greed, and further on in the same passage the apostle rules out participation in obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking and getting drunk.

"Paul, you're negative and restrictive" some would argue. But not so! Read Ephesians 4:17 to 5:21 to see these prohibitions in the context of positive Christianity. The first test of anything is the degree to which it helps or hinders spiritual progress. If it is not good for us then let us throw off everything that hinders, and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run..." (10). Let us touch only those forms of enjoyment which leave us spiritually alert and ready for service.

### **Time for Enjoyment?**

In a busy life time for relaxation is essential if we are not to become ill. Enjoyment of God's world and creation, singing, dancing and music, laughter and the joy of like-minded people getting together are all enthusiastically mentioned in the Bible as legitimate enjoyment for God's people (11). Yet we know how easily we can abuse even this and an innocent pleasure can run into our devotional time or leave little or no time for service in the assembly. The New Testament pictures us as soldiers enduring hardship in a great conflict (12) and as athletes in strict training (13). Both are pictures of dedication and

commitment and both call for self-denial. And so our Christian lives should be empty and joyless, should they? Nothing of the sort! The Lord Jesus said about His disciples, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full”<sup>14</sup> and that is both a promise and a challenge.

### **A Diet of Pleasure and Entertainment**

A secular magazine which arrived in my mail recently spoke enthusiastically about the last decade in the west as: “the time when the fruits of high technology entered our homes, never to be evicted. In many ways the last ten years has been preeminently the decade of the life style - there have been very few times in history when so many were able to devote so much time to thinking about the packaging rather than just the contents of their lives. Hence the fantastic boom in the products of the design business, the obsessive interest in fashion, in food, in art and all the other goodies of a hyper-affluent society.”

That ties in with Paul’s words to Timothy, “But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” It was not having a bit of well-earned relaxation that Paul was warning about but the obsessive going after pleasure, entertainments and fun that is characteristic of the world today and which is the opposite of the disciple attitude in which “the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (16). A junk diet of pleasure and entertainment is far more harmful to our spiritual lives than all the junk food will ever be to our bodies. Perhaps a good exercise would be to write down and compare the time spent in leisure activities with the time spent in reading and meditation on the Word of God.

### **The Test**

In Psalm 1 two ways of life are contrasted. The mark of the blessed man is his delight in the law of the Lord. Everything he does is done in the light of meditation on God’s revealed will and according to God’s standards. For a disciple of the Lord Jesus the true test is: “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (17).

Doing something in the name of the Lord Jesus brings His authority to it, and Jesus Christ is Lord! We are on safe ground if what we are doing is compatible with the honour and authority of “the name that is above every name” (19), and if, having done it, we can genuinely thank our heavenly Father for the experience.

### **At Someone Else’s Expense?**

Even when there is clearly no violation of divine principles in relation to any particular

pleasure we still need to ensure that it is not a case of our fun at the expense of another. That other could be our brother or sister. Writing about things like this Paul warned the Corinthians, “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling-block to the weak” (19), and that is a sound principle to observe in relation to our enjoyment.

This does not give us the right to restrict what others do but rather provides a framework for us to honour the Lord in what we do! More seriously though that other could be the Lord Himself! Devoting time to leisure while failing to obey the command of the Lord in relation to meeting together (20) is robbing God, as is needlessly spending money on entertainment while the Assembly outreach programme is curtailed through lack of funds. That is our fun at God’s expense and is unthinkable for a disciple of the Lord Jesus! Examining our priorities in relation to this is as relevant now as it was in Malachi’s time<sup>21</sup>.

### **Finally**

“... Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me - put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you” (22)

If those principles form the basis of our relaxation then we will have no fear of rebuke from the Master. May it be so for each of us.

All Bible quotations are from the New International Version.

1. Rom. 13:13 and 1 Tim. 4:8. 2. W.E. Vine. 3. 1 John 5:19. 4. John 16:11. 5. John 16:33. 6. 1 John 2:15. 7. John 17:15-17. 8. Eph. 4:17. 9. Eph. 5:3. 10. Heb. 12:1. 11. *E.g.* Psalm 30:11-12; 126:2; 149:3-5. 12. 2 Tim. 2:3. 13. 1 Cor. 9:25. 14. John 10:10. 15. 2 Tim. 3:1,2,4. 16. Gal. 6:14. 17. Col. 3:17. 18. Phil. 2:9. 19. 1 Cor. 8:9. 20. Heb. 10:25. 21. See Malachi 3:8-10. 22. Phil. 4:8-9.

## **CHAPTER TWELVE: THE RIGHT TO VOTE**

Voting on issues is becoming common in many areas of life. Many more disciples now have a legal right to vote, express political opinions, or even potentially to become politicians, and the disciple might expect to be asked how he or she intends to vote, or why a right to vote is not being used.

The term disciple is used here to describe faithful followers of the Lord Jesus Christ who submit themselves to what the Scriptures say in respect to all aspects of their personal lives and their associations with others. The principles governing the disciple's use of voting rights can be applied to many situations but this chapter concentrates on voting in political matters.

### **Christian Governments**

It is always wise to consider where our actions will lead us; if our direction is wrong, then even a small step further will be unhelpful. If the desired outcome of disciples using their right to vote is to establish a Christian government, administered through politicians who are disciples, we should first see if that objective conforms to Scripture.

The Bible commands disciples to submit to every governmental authority (Romans 13:1), not just those authorities which maintain Christian beliefs and practices. Also, the Bible frequently refers to disciples being unjustly treated, and being expected to take such injustice patiently (e.g. 1 Peter 2:13-20). Disciples endure this because they know that in due course their Lord will return, avenge injustice and establish worldwide a government of perfect equity and justice.

Perhaps as a reaction to oppression there are some who are trying to put into place now by political activity the kind of government they expect Christ to adopt when He returns to rule the earth. They propose that disciples become politicians with a view to their making laws to promote evangelism. Certainly this appears attractive, as does the idea of voting for a believer (who can benefit from the help of the Holy Spirit) rather than an unbeliever. Yet, however sincere these actions are, they do not appear to be supported by Scripture. The Bible does not say that the future reign of Christ on earth will result from the election of a government formed of a majority of believers; rather, it will be ushered in by the personal return of Christ. Nor does it say that, pending that event, the present spiritual expression of the kingdom of God should include both believers and unbelievers; in fact only born-again people can see that kingdom, and obedience to its rules is necessary to be a part of it (John 3:3; Acts 8:12; Galatians 5:21).

The aims of political government and those who seek to further the kingdom of God through their evangelism are very different, for it is a primary role of government to achieve and maintain justice, but a disciple's objective in evangelistic witness is salvation of the hearer. Law-makers, disciples or otherwise, cannot force the change of heart required for salvation; rules may govern actions but they cannot change motives.

History itself teaches a tragic lesson of attempts to combine the roles of church and state: the slaughter of the crusades and the murderous inquisitions spring to mind. The pages of history have not yet closed on other examples of religious groups pursuing opposite political objectives. Clearly even born-again believers can be guilty of serious error when attempting to use politics to promote religious views.

### **Negative Votes**

Some would say that the disciple has a responsibility to vote against non-Christian activities. This presumes that all disciples would agree on what should be voted against. Problems may be encountered even in the smallest political spheres such as local planning authorities; exercising rights to vote even in such minor matters can easily lead to evident differences of opinion between Christians as to the correct course. This casts doubts on claims that Christians benefit from guidance by God, and brings difficulties as to how far to pursue issues which can have both a local and wider application. Attempts by believers to be united as to what to vote against, or for, have sometimes necessitated damaging compromises or wrong teaching, both obviously in conflict with the will of God for His people.

### **The Big Picture**

In regard to the global political scene the Bible only indicates a worsening of the situation, leading to a church/state empire led by Antichrist (Revelation 13:1-8). This has resulted in the consciences of many disciples preventing them from participating actively in a political process that will one day be headed by the Man of Sin. The reality is that sin in the heart usually causes a failure to achieve political ideals or to deal properly with the power that political office brings.

### **Political Activity by Disciples**

Some born-again politicians have tried hard to use their positions to achieve improvements in society. However, the Lord Jesus did not expect His disciples to be absorbed in this world's affairs (John 17:14-16). Some people would say that the disciple's responsibility to be the "salt of the earth" requires them to be involved in all aspects of

society, including the political scene. We suggest that attempting to deal with error by joining with those who are responsible for that state of affairs is contrary to the principle of Scripture that the people of God should separate themselves from error in order to maintain their purity (e.g. 2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1).

The Scriptures describe disciples as ambassadors, exiles and aliens; people whose citizenship is in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:20); Hebrews 11:13; 1 Peter 2:11; Philippians 3:20). We need to think carefully about these descriptions for they have clear application in the matter of a disciple's involvement in politics. None of the descriptions involve participation in political affairs - they suggest the opposite. In most democratic societies ambassadors, exiles and aliens have no right to vote. Why then should the disciple need such a right?

### **Who Rules?**

There is clear guidance in the New Testament that disciples are to obey the government and those it charges with law enforcement. Such authorities are not there by accident, they are determined by God (Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13,14) for God requires order in human activity. Anarchy is against His will (1 Corinthians 14:33,40; Deuteronomy 12:8; Judges 21:25). God's purposes cannot be thwarted by the ballot box or by force of arms, and whether governments exhibit right or wrong policies they rule only by God's permissive or purposive will (Romans 13:1-6). Disciples should therefore think carefully before they question the authority of, or disobey, the various forms of government, and they should also be careful about openly expressing negative views as to political parties.

This is not to say that all actions of governments will meet with the disciple's approval; the question is: "What should be the disciple's response?" Acts 12 records the killing of the apostle James and the subsequent imprisonment of Peter by Herod. If the Scriptures needed to provide an example of political intervention by disciples, surely this would have been the ideal set of circumstances to justify it! However, what happened was that God intervened directly in response to the prayers of the Church of God in Jerusalem (verse 5). Acts Chapter 4 (especially verses 1-3, 1&20, 33) agrees with this: Peter and John did not take the kind of action that in our day would be described as civil disobedience! There is no mention of disrespect for the authorities who had wrongfully condemned them, nor of stirring others to turn against those authorities; the people were encouraged to turn to God through Christ the emphasis was on the positive.

### **The Disciple's Role**

What can disciples do to promote a right moral attitude in the political system of their respective nations? God does not necessarily require action by us in order to accomplish His purposes. Disciples can, however, be effective in two ways. Their witnessing may result in people turning to Christ, and being brought under God's rule in the order He has set for government of His people within the structure of churches of God. Potential exists there for the achievement of justice and solutions to problems of need; evidence of that is found in the opening chapters of the Book of the Acts (e.g. Acts 2:44,45; 4:34,35). Of equal importance is the power of prayer. In fact, God expects disciples to use prayer to achieve a satisfactory political scene (1 Timothy 2:1-3; cf. Jeremiah 29:7). God delights to help the helpless and He can overcome where we, despite our best intentions and greatest energies, might only fail.



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Chapter Five: This Do In Remembrance Of Me

Chapter Six: Discipleship – It’s Character And Potential

Chapter Seven: The Promise Of The Comforter

Chapter Eight: The Vine And The Branches

Chapter Nine: The Disciple And The World

Chapter Ten: The Holy Spirit’s Ministry

Chapter Eleven: The Father Himself Loves You

Chapter Twelve: Final Supplications

### **Exploring Issues Of Life – A Challenge To Live As God Intended**

This book aims to explore biblical attitudes to some of today’s most pressing moral and social issues. God says in Isaiah 55:8 that “....my thoughts are not your thoughts”, so we need to be prepared to have our thinking adjusted from that of society around us and be willing to swim against the flow using a Christian worldview and a Christian mindset.

The following issues are tackled:

- Global issues - the environment, military involvement, politics, a world of need
- Spiritual issues - the New Age movement, the role of women, fasting, vegetarianism, signs and wonders
- Lifestyle issues - career and educational planning, money & power, entertainment, addictive substances
- Personal issues - singleness, marriage, divorce

- Family Issues - contraception, infertility, abortion
- Sexual issues - sexual standards, homosexuality

Each chapter concludes with study questions and a summary of the key sub-issues, to enable the reader to develop the issues further, either individually or in small groups. This is an ideal primer or workbook for those studying Christian morality, Christian values, Christian living and Christian practice.

### **A Study in Prophetic Principles**

Do you find Bible prophecy to be a confusing subject? Would you like to be able to understand Bible prophecy about the end times, not just in the book of Revelation, but in the Bible books of Daniel, Ezekiel and others as well? In this concise Bible commentary, George Prasher provides the keys to Bible prophecy by exploring and explaining the underlying principles and patterns in four main sections:

1. The significance and range of prophecy in the plan of divine revelation
2. Patterns of prophetic presentation
3. The main themes of Bible prophecy
4. A study of false prophecy

This is an ideal book if you are planning to start a prophecy Bible study, either personally or as a group.

### **Other Titles**

- Opened Secrets – Nine Great Bible Mysteries
- The Finger of Prophecy
- Bible Covenants 101
- The Holy Spirit 101
- Satan and His Kingdom
- Profiles of the Prophets: God's Bible Messengers
- Musings on the Minor Prophets
- Discipleship 101 – Basics For Believers
- Ezekiel 101 – Getting To Know God
- What Have We To Give? Bible Devotions From a Missionary to Burma

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