

# IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

UNDERSTANDING AND USING  
THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

BY TIM SULLIVAN

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## PROLOGUE

The synagogue rulers were troubled. Yet another follower of the Nazarene – this time someone named Stephen – was stirring up Jerusalem with miracles and wonders done in the name of Jesus. People came from all around to hear his message of hope and comfort. His words effervesced with life, so unlike the cheerless rituals to which they were accustomed. The sick in body, in mind, and in heart were revived.

The religious magistrates knew they were being exposed as actors in costume with only the pretense of spirituality. But each time they tried to disrupt him, Stephen's words cut through their arguments like a sword. "They were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10). Their frustration turned into indignation. Who was this unschooled troublemaker? How dare he question their authority? How could he be stopped?

In secret conferences in darkened rooms, the elders explored their options. They realized that their best tactic would be to turn the people against Stephen. They knew they could rely on the fickleness of the crowd. They paid men to spread lies about him, twisting his words into blasphemy against God. With remarkable ease, his adoring audience was transformed into an accusing mob.

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And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon *him*, and caught him, and brought *him* to the council ... (v. 12)

Stephen full well realized the danger of his situation, yet he would not recant. His love for his people and his burning desire that they know their Messiah emboldened him all the more. "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears," he cried. "Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye" (Acts 7:51).

The council members were outraged. There was no need to deliberate over a verdict. They cast Stephen out of the city to stone him, intent on purging the holy city of this uncleanness.

And Saul was consenting unto his death ... (Acts 8:1a)

As he stood by watching, a young man felt a strange mixture of horror and satisfaction with the sound of each rock that found its mark. He too was a zealot of the Judaic religion, and he had no doubt that this punishment well suited the crime. Yet he could not help notice how the demonic grimaces on the faces of the executioners contrasted so greatly with the angelic disposition of the accused.

With his last breath, Stephen cried out, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!" (Acts 7:60). A shower of rocks continued to pelt his dead body until finally the crowd was called away. The mob slowly dispersed, all but the silent witness, the young man known as Saul of Tarsus. Try as he might, he could not get this man's words out of his mind.

Years passed, along with his youth. Saul of Tarsus was now known as Paul the apostle. He who had consented unto the death of Stephen now awaited his own execution for the same crime. As Paul sat in his Roman prison cell, he knew that he would soon join that fraternity of martyrs who had sacrificed their lives so others could hear the gospel of salvation, the gospel of the grace of God. When he sat down to write his final letter of instruction to Timothy, his much-beloved son in the faith, the words poured from his heart like water from a fountain.

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:6-8)

It is a wonder that the prison did not collapse around him like the



walls of Jericho, unable to contain the joy bursting from his heart. Paul had completed his mission. He could die without regret, knowing that he had accomplished all that the Lord had required of him. He knew that he would be awarded a crown of righteousness. Even more precious to him, he knew that he would hear those glorious words from his Master as he stood before him at his throne of judgment, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy lord” (Matt. 25:21).

As Saul of Tarsus, he had wrapped himself in robes of wealth and prestige. By his own testimony, he had “profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation” (Gal. 1:14). But when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, his life turned upside down. All that he had worked so hard to obtain – his reputation, his influence, his worldly comforts and securities – was soon lost. But make no mistake – this was the result of conviction and not robbery. Paul’s heart was fixed upon a much greater prize. Like a man eager to scale a tall mountain, he gladly forsook anything that weighed him down.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ .... (Philippians 3:8)

Many would consider “the loss of all things” a price too high to pay. Ironically, there are people occupying pulpits today who use their sacred office to pursue the same worldly treasures that Paul so readily surrendered. Truly, they are the “hirelings” of whom Jesus spoke, for whom the ministry is only a source of income, a job.

But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. (John 10:12–13)

One man’s life provides two examples to all who follow a religious pursuit. One offers worldly securities; the other promises eternal reward. You and I must decide who will be our role model: Saul of Tarsus or Paul the apostle. There is no hybrid choice. As Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters” (Matt. 6:24).

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:10)

For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their

own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple. (Romans 16:18)

When Paul answered God's call, he knew that he was not being invited to a life of privilege and ease. Better than most, he understood the immediate consequences of his decision. But this awareness of the need for personal sacrifice was not given to Paul alone. Through the centuries, countless men and women have begun their service to God with the same heartfelt desire to "finish my course with joy" (Acts 20:24). Why have so many failed along the way? The difference cannot be measured in terms of sincerity. No true Christian wants to disappoint his Master. No one purposes to fail in his service to God. But the simple desire to fight the good fight and run the good race is not sufficient to ensure a positive outcome. You must have more.

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. (Luke 14:28-30)

In this parable told by Jesus, the builder did not fail for lack of desire. He failed because he did not have everything he needed. Many Christians will fail to complete their life's mission for the same reason. But God has promised that "ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). Paul assured the church, "My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19). Since these promises are true, why are so many Christians suffering from deficiency?

The question is not "Will God supply?" The question is "*What* will God supply?" What do you require, and what has been provided, so that you can follow in the footsteps of Paul and finish the race that has been set before you? This book, In the Power of His Might, was written to answer these questions.

## PART ONE

# WHY WE NEED THE SPIRITUAL GIFTS



# 1.

## WHEN I AM WEAK, THEN AM I STRONG

The people we read of in the Bible have none of the superhuman qualities of their counterparts in myth and legend. Instead, they are plainly and rather painfully flawed, quite often foolish and full of fear. The only hero of the Bible is God. This in itself is a lesson to us all.

When God called Moses, he told him that he would “send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt” (Exod. 3:10). Moses answered, “Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (v. 11). On one hand, Moses seemed an obvious choice for the job. He had been raised as the son of the Pharaoh’s daughter. No Israelite was more familiar with the inner workings of the Egyptian government than he. Acts 7:22 says, “Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.” On the other hand, neither the Pharaoh, nor the Children of Israel, nor Moses himself had any reason to believe that he was qualified to speak for God, or to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land.

When God first appeared to Isaiah, the prophet feared for his life, saying, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa. 6:5).

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When God called Jeremiah, the prophet protested saying, “Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child” (Jer. 1:6). Like Moses, he was overwhelmed and even intimidated by the work he was called to do. He knew that he was, of himself, not equal to the task.

In the parable told by Jesus, the builder failed because he did not first sit down to count the cost of his undertaking, to know whether he had “sufficient to finish it.” As we begin our Christian ministry, we too must know whether we, as of ourselves, are equal to the task. The answer is a resounding and definitive, “No!”

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency *is* of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament ... (2 Corinthians 3:5–6a)

A person may have the talent, the intelligence, and the tenacity to succeed in any worldly enterprise, yet these talents and abilities do not make him sufficient for the work of the ministry. Such natural skills may, in fact, prove to be his undoing, for where he depends upon himself, he will not depend on God.

### THAT NO FLESH SHOULD GLORY IN HIS PRESENCE

Have you ever wondered why God chose you to be his servant? What characteristics did he see in you that told him you were qualified for the task? The answer might surprise you!

For most of my life, I have lived near the ocean. I love to walk along the shoreline, breathing the salt air, hearing the rolling waves and the squawking gulls, feeling the sun on my face and the warm sand beneath my feet. In time my attention will turn to the seashells that the waves have washed up along the beach. I will pick up a handful and one by one discard those that I do not think are pretty enough to keep.

When the Lord looks for someone to call into Christian service, what qualities does he seek? What did he see in me that told him to slip me into his pocket rather than throw me back into the sea of humanity? What was it about me that told him I was perfectly suited for the job? The fact is, I had the qualifications he was looking for.

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are ... (1 Corinthians 1:27–28)

If the Lord chooses those who are foolish, weak, base, and despised, then those are the qualities he seeks. “Ah, here is one,” he said when choosing me. “This one is quite foolish! He is weak, he is base, and he is despised. He is perfect for what I have in mind.” His reasoning is clear: “That no flesh should glory in his presence” (v. 29).

### STRENGTH MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS

In life, we often equate maturity with self-reliance. But this is not a quality that God desires in his children. “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool,” says Proverbs 28:26. The mature Christian is he that has learned to fully rely on God. “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart,” advises Proverbs 3:5, “and lean not unto thine own understanding.” In the eyes of God, self-reliance is an evil thing.

For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, *and* hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. (Jeremiah 2:13)

Jesus was a living testimony of complete dependency upon God. In John 5:30, he said, “I can of mine own self do nothing.” What is true for the vine is also true for the branches. Without him, we can do nothing.

I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. (John 15:5)

The branch relies on the nourishment of the vine to bring forth fruit. If it is hewn from the vine, the branch will wither and die. A self-reliant Christian is in the same predicament. He is cut off from the vine, separate from God. His existence will be fruitless and dry. This is the curse of self-reliance.

Thus saith the LORD; Cursed *be* the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, *in* a salt land and not inhabited. (Jeremiah 17:5–6)

On the other hand, the blessings of God rain upon those who put their trust in him. This is the secret to a fruitful and prosperous life.

Blessed *is* the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and *that* spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. (vv. 7–8)

Jesus said, “Without me you can do nothing.” But Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13). Whether you do *nothing* or *all things* is determined by where you put your trust. Only those who lean upon the Lord will discover his strength.

Proverbs 24:10 says, “If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small.” The man who expects his personal fortitude to sustain him through difficult times will discover how quickly his well runs dry. Paul did not faint in his day of adversity because he did not trust in the power of his own might.

And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. (2 Corinthians 12:7–8)

Three times Paul asked the Lord to remove a painful obstruction from his life, a “thorn in the flesh.” Three times his request was denied. Then, in a moment of enlightenment, Paul realized that perhaps *his* solution was not *God’s* solution. He stopped asking for the removal of the hindrance, and sought instead to understand God’s purpose in allowing it.

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. (v. 9a)

This thorn in the flesh was a constant reminder to Paul of his human frailty and his need to live in the Lord’s strength. “My grace,” said God, “is sufficient for thee.” Paul no longer bemoaned his many adversities but rather began to glory in them. “When I am weak,” he avowed, “then am I strong.”

Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (vv. 9b–10)

God’s strength is perfected in our weakness. Until we acknowledge our deficiency, we will not seek his supply. We must be continuously aware that we can do nothing without him, and that we are in constant need of his assistance. “Seek the LORD and his strength,” says 1 Chronicles 16:11, “seek his face continually.”

God is not looking for strong people. He is looking for people who will be strong in him, “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his



might” (Eph. 6:10). He has no intention of making us self-sufficient. He wants us to be as reliant on him as the branch is the vine. Only then will we be truly free to serve him.

Problems that are overwhelming to you are as nothing to God. “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh,” he declares in Jeremiah 32:27, “is there any thing too hard for me?” Your strength is never small when you stand in the power of his might. Living in his strength, in his sufficiency, is the only way to fight the good fight and run the good race.

He giveth power to the faint; and to *them that have* no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew *their* strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; *and* they shall walk, and not faint. (Isaiah 40:29–31)



## 2.

### THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET

Once upon a time, there was a man who thought he could grow a mountain by planting stones. He sweated and strained to clear the land and till the soil. He carefully placed each hand-selected stone upon its soil bed, covering it in a soft blanket of soil. As the weeks rolled by, he watered his garden faithfully, careful to keep it free from weeds. But though he worked as hard as any gardener who ever lived, all he gained for his labor was a sore back. All his work was in vain, because stones will never grow into mountains.

#### I HAVE NOT RUN IN VAIN

The more I age, the more I notice how quickly the years go by. “For what is your life?” asks James 4:14. “It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.” The most precious commodity we have in this life is our time. Once it has been spent, it cannot be replenished.

As Christians who are serious about our faith, we are not likely to squander our time in idleness. However, we must be careful not to consume our days in fruitless activity. Either sin results in a wasted life. How wonderful it would be to finish your days able to say like Paul, “I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain” (Phil. 2:16).

Many things done “in the name of the Lord” were neither initiated nor authorized by him. Jesus said, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:22–23). God does not bless all things done in his name. He only gives reward for labor that he commissions, work done according to his specifications. If we do not run our race according to his direction, we will run in vain. If we do not labor according to his guidance, we will labor in vain.

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain. (Psalm 127:1)

In order to know that our labor is not in vain, we must know that our labor is appointed by him. In order to obtain the promised reward, we must run the course that he has purposed for us. “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?” asks 1 Corinthians 9:24. “So run, that ye may obtain.”

One might suppose that the Lord is pleased with all forms of worship, so long as they are directed towards him. This is certainly a popular belief today, but is it true? This is not what Jesus said! “In vain they do worship me,” he said, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). Notice that Jesus did not say, “In vain they worship false gods.” He said, “In vain they worship ME!” The object of their worship was correct, but their belief system was wrong. They were “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

### HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

Imagine coming to the Judgment Seat of Christ expecting a bountiful reward for a lifetime of personal sacrifice and community service, only to learn that your labor had no value to God. That is not something anyone wants to experience! How can such a situation be prevented? How can we know the way God intends for us to serve him? As Ezekiel 33:10 asks, “How should we then live?” Deuteronomy 4:1 provides the answer: “Hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live.” God wants us to live according to his statutes and judgments.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this *is* the whole *duty* of man. (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

No one can live according to God's statutes until he knows what they are. That is why we have the Word of God. The Bible is a gift from God to man, given to instruct and to inspire him. The purpose of the Scriptures is to teach us how to live, so that we do not live in vain. This knowledge is called "instruction in righteousness."

All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness .... (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Bible is not a book of man's musings about God. By his Spirit, God breathed his message into the hearts of certain men ordained to record the revelations given to them. The Bible is God's revelation of himself to his creation, given to instruct man in the way of righteousness.

The testimony of the Word of God is eternally true. "Thy word is true from the beginning," says Psalm 119:160, "and every one of thy righteous judgments endureth for ever." The light of the Word of God gives understanding to people of all ages. "The entrance of thy words giveth light," says Psalm 119:130, "it giveth understanding unto the simple." This light shows us the path that God wants us to take.

Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.  
(Psalm 119:105)

I was ministering in the Maasai village of Matebete in Tanzania, East Africa. Our meetings were normally held in the daylight hours, but one night we added an evening service to the schedule. A gas-powered generator was used to light the meeting room.

A footpath ran from the individual dwellings in the village to the church. I knew this path fairly well. It was straight, level, and relatively clear of obstruction. However, I had only walked it in the light of day. On this particular night, a thick canopy of clouds hung overhead, obscuring both the moon and the stars. I had never experienced such darkness before. I could not see my hand held two inches from my face, much less the ground beneath my feet. I felt paralyzed. With each step I felt like I was plunging into an abyss. It amazed me that the Maasai were not bothered at all by what seemed like total darkness to me. Some of them owned bicycles, and I could hear them zipping past me while I shuffled along at a snail's pace. Suddenly this verse from Isaiah became more vivid to me than ever before:

We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if *we had* no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the night; *we are* in desolate places as dead men. (Isaiah 59:10)

Even with the companionship of my hosts, I felt lost and vulnerable – not a pleasant state of mind when walking through the open air of Africa at night! Though I knew that the path was straight, and that there were no pitfalls along the way, I could not walk it with confidence.

The road of life is often bumpy and filled with potential dangers. Every day we face new options and crossroads. How much more do we need our way to be plainly visible? Unless the light of God brightens our path, we will surely “stumble at noonday as in the night.”

God never intended that we grope through life like the blind. He wants us to see where we are going. He wants us to run with confidence down the straight and narrow way. How can this be possible except his Word be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path? But this is the promise of the Lord Jesus who said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12).

The American writer John Godfrey Saxe wrote an amusing poem based on a fable told many years ago in India. In his poem, six blind men met an elephant as they walked along their path. Each man described the elephant the best he could, hampered as he was by his limited perception. The first man ran his hands along the elephant’s side and said, “An elephant is very like a wall!” The second grabbed hold of the elephant’s tusk and said, “An elephant is very like a spear.” The third felt the elephant’s long trunk and said, “An elephant is very like a snake.” The fourth wrapped his arms around the elephant’s leg and said, “An elephant is very like a tree.” The fifth felt the smoothness of the elephant’s ear and said, “An elephant is very like a fan.” The sixth blind man swung the elephant’s tail and said, “An elephant is very like a rope.”

Without the light of God’s Word, man fares little better than those six blind men. He has many ideas about God, some that are indeed true, but he cannot see the whole picture. Is this not how denominations are born, each one holding fast to that particular portion of the Bible it considers most important? One man bellows, “Christianity is very like this!” while another cries, “A fool you are! Christianity is very like this!” They are very like the blind men of Saxe’s poem, “Each in his own opinion, exceeding stiff and strong, Though each was partly in the right, and all were in the wrong!”

Surely we can appreciate why we need the Word of God: so that we can walk in light and not in darkness. Only then can we run the

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race that is set before us with confidence, knowing that our labor is not in vain.

They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they *are* the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. (Isaiah 65:23)





### 3.

## PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT, LINE UPON LINE

In the early days of the Christian church, God sent Philip on a mission to the land of Gaza. Here he met “a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians” (Acts 8:27). The eunuch was on his way home from Jerusalem, where he had gone to worship. When Philip approached him, he was sitting in his chariot, reading the prophecies of Isaiah. We can only marvel at the amazing circumstances that had to precede this event. How had this Ethiopian become interested in the religion of the Jews? How had he obtained this scroll, or learned to read Hebrew? Clearly the Lord had been at work to prepare him for his appointment with Philip.

Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to *him*, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. (Acts 8:29–31)

Look at this man’s honesty! Though he was a man of prestige, he freely admitted that he could not understand what he was reading, something many students of the Bible are loath to do. His candor was matched only by his meekness, as evidenced by his request.

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And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. (vv. 34–35)

The eunuch was absolutely correct: man needs a guide to truth. Jesus said, “If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt. 15:14). Thankfully, the Great Shepherd himself is willing to be our guide throughout the days of our lives.

For this God *is* our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide *even* unto death. (Psalm 48:14)

No matter how skillful the guide, his success depends upon the willingness of his followers. The people of God would do well to walk in the same honesty and meekness characterized by this man of Ethiopia. “The meek will he guide in judgment,” says Psalm 25:9, “and the meek will he teach his way.”

### GIVE ME UNDERSTANDING, AND I SHALL LIVE

Like the eunuch, we all need help in our quest to know God. Petitions for spiritual understanding should come first on our prayer list. Far too often, it is the last thing we remember to ask for.

When my children ask a favor of me, there are two things I think about before I respond. First, I consider whether I have the ability to give them what they want. Second, I consider whether it is in their best interest to have their wish granted. I give an answer to every petition, although I do not fulfill their every desire.

God answers every prayer, although not always with the response we desire. Very often, his answer must be, “No.” Why is this? He has the ability to fulfill our every fantasy! As Jeremiah said, “There is nothing too hard for thee” (Jer. 32:17). Why does he not always do as we ask? The problem is in the things we request. We “know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Rom. 8:26). In his wisdom and loving kindness, God will not grant a request that is not in our best interest. James 4:3 says, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” But when our prayer is according to his will – and therefore to our ultimate benefit – God will answer our request in a most positive way. One prayer that God is sure to grant is a petition for spiritual understanding. Such are these prayers from the book of Psalms:

Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law; yea, I shall observe it with *my* whole heart. (Psalm 119:34)

Thy hands have made me and fashioned me: give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments. (v. 73)

The righteousness of thy testimonies *is* everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live. (v. 144)

These verses reflect the state of mind that God desires for his people. There is nothing more precious to God than to hear his children ask for instruction in righteousness. “I have no greater joy,” says our heavenly Father, “than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 1:4). To walk in truth, you must first be led in truth. To be led in truth, you must consistently seek his guidance.

Shew me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou *art* the God of my salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. (Psalm 25:4-5)

### THE WAY OF THY PRECEPTS

Psalm 23:3 says, “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” God leads his people in the paths of righteousness by teaching them the way of his precepts. “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts,” says Psalm 119:27, “so shall I talk of thy wondrous works.”

The precepts of God teach us how to set our lives in proper order. The Psalmist wrote, “Order my steps in thy word” (Ps. 119:133). We set our priorities according to the things that God considers most important. We make sure that what God wants first in our lives comes first.

The first lesson of our instruction in righteousness is to learn the fear of the LORD. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,” says Proverbs 9:10. “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever,” says Psalm 19:9. Until a man has learned to walk with utmost reverence toward God, his relationship with God and the people of God will be tainted with self-interest and pride.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 7:1)

Keeping the first commandment is the secret to keeping all the law.

And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments *is*, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first

commandment. And the second *is* like, *namely* this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:29–31)

For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love *is* the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:9–10)

The first precept of biblical study is to know that the Word of God is not subject to private interpretation.

Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:20–21)

Peter was not ashamed to admit that Paul’s epistles contained “some things hard to be understood.” At the same time, he warned of those who twist the Scriptures to make the Bible say what they want it to say. This, he said, they do “unto their own destruction.”

As also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:16)

Paul himself wrote of those who “corrupt the word of God” (2 Cor. 2:17), and “handle the word of God deceitfully” (2 Cor. 4:2). If we do not want to be guilty of distorting the Scriptures, of corrupting the Word of God, or of handling the Word of God deceitfully, we must obey this fundamental precept of God concerning the proper handling of his Word. There is no man-made technique that is useful for interpreting the Bible. The meaning of the Scriptures must come from God himself. It is God’s Word, and he knows his intended meaning. As Joseph said to the Pharaoh, “Do not interpretations belong to God?” (Gen. 40:8).

The Creator of heaven and earth is the God of perfect order. That order is reflected in the way he leads his people in the path of truth. The Lord brings us to an increased understanding of his Word one step at a time, precept upon precept, line upon line, truth upon truth.

For precept *must* be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, *and* there a little ... (Isaiah 28:10)

Psalm 18:33 says, “He maketh my feet like hinds’ feet, and setteth me upon my high places.” A hind is the female member of the red deer family. Even in rough, mountainous terrain, these deer are sure-footed, scaling the rocky heights step-by-step. This is the way for the people of God to ascend to the heights of spiritual understanding, step-by-step, precept upon precept, line upon line. Here a little and there a little, God reveals his Word to his people, not from one or two books of the Bible, but from the entire Word. No truth stands alone; no idea is severed from its context.

When Joseph interpreted the dreams of the Pharaoh, he said, “The dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God” (Gen. 41:32). Precept must be upon precept. What you read once in the Bible can be very interesting. But what you read two or three times is established by God. This rule of interpretation is our safeguard against wrestling with the Scriptures. This truth itself is established by a double witness!

... in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. (Matthew 18:16b)

... In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established. (2 Corinthians 13:1b)

Jesus taught that even concerning his own testimony, his witness alone was not sufficient. He said, “If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true” (John 5:31). But Christ knew that those who examine the Scriptures would find confirmation for the things he taught. “Search the scriptures,” he said. “They are they which testify of me” (v. 39).

There is no contradiction between God and his Word, neither is there any disagreement between the Word and the Holy Spirit. The Father, his Word, and his Spirit are one.

For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.  
(1 John 5:7)

Like a three-legged stool, you need the threefold witness of the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost to keep your spiritual life in balance. Remove one leg and you will lose stability. Such are the Christians that exalt the written Word but forsake the inner witness of the Spirit. Inevitably, their perception of scriptural truths is rigid and shallow. At the other extreme are Christians who are so eager to be “Spirit-led” that they belittle the witness of the written Word. Such Christians are easily taken captive by fanaticism.

The requirement of two or three witnesses governs the Old and the New Testament alike. In the days of Moses, we read, “He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses” (Heb. 10:28). From Paul’s New Testament letter to Timothy, we read, “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19). Holy Scripture itself is established by two great witnesses: the Old Testament and the New. As someone wisely observed, the Old Testament is the New Testament concealed, and the New Testament is the Old Testament revealed. The Bible is one book, containing one message, the message of salvation in the name of Jesus Christ.

You will remember that Jesus warned of worship that was mired in falsehood. “In vain they do worship me,” he said, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). Hundreds of years before the appearance of Christ on earth, Isaiah testified to the same truth.

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men .... (Isaiah 29:13)

The precepts and commandments of men can beguile even the most sincere people of God. Many Christians have been persuaded that it is a sign of religious intolerance to reject ideas that violate biblical truth. To the contrary, it is good in the sight of God that we learn to hate every false way.

Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. (Psalm 119:104)

Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things* to be right; *and* I hate every false way. (v. 128)

For this reason, God’s people are commanded to keep his precepts diligently, and to have respect unto his ways.

Thou hast commanded *us* to keep thy precepts diligently. (v. 4)

I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. (v. 15)

Paul told Timothy, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). Make no mistake. Those who depart from God’s precepts will not stand approved before him.

We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments .... (Daniel 9:5)

## PRECEPT UPON PRECEPT, LINE UPON LINE

Only those who live according to God's holy rules will know the blessings of a holy life. "I will walk at liberty," says Psalm 119:45, "for I seek thy precepts." Jesus said it another way: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32).





## 4.

### WHAT TIME I AM AFRAID, I WILL TRUST IN THEE

King Hezekiah ruled the southern tribes of Judah during a very turbulent time of her history. In the sixth year of his reign, the Assyrian army besieged Samaria, the capital of the northern tribes of Israel, and carried her people off into captivity. The Assyrians then turned their sights southward to the land of Judah. Eight years later, “in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah’s reign did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them” (2 Kings 18:13).

Hezekiah had worked diligently to cleanse Judah of the corruption caused by his father, Asah. “In the first year of his reign, in the first month,” says 2 Chronicles 29:3, Hezekiah “opened the doors of the house of the LORD, and repaired them.” He then restored the priests and the Levites to their office saying, “Hear me, ye Levites, sanctify now yourselves, and sanctify the house of the LORD God of your fathers, and carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place” (v. 5).

And thus did Hezekiah throughout all Judah, and wrought *that which* was good and right and truth before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did *it* with all his heart, and prospered. (2 Chronicles 31:20–21)

But when the king of Assyria threatened to invade his land, Hezekiah followed the example of those who had ruled before him. He tried to appease the Assyrian emperor with a tribute payment, sabotaging the very restorations he had commissioned.

And Hezekiah gave *him* all the silver that was found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off *the gold from* the doors of the temple of the LORD, and *from* the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave it to the king of Assyria.  
(2 Kings 18:15–16)

Hezekiah soon realized that the Assyrians would not be satisfied with just a token of Jerusalem's treasure. Sennacherib wanted all the wealth of the city of David. The king of Judah commanded his soldiers to make ready for war. Barricades were fortified and waterways rerouted. Finally, the king addressed his people with words of courage and faith.

And he set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying, Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that *is* with him: for *there be* more with us than with him: With him *is* an arm of flesh; but with us *is* the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah.  
(2 Chronicles 32:6–8)

The king of Assyria learned of Hezekiah's preparations, and dispatched a messenger to Jerusalem with words intended to weaken the resolve of the people.

He wrote also letters to rail on the LORD God of Israel, and to speak against him, saying, As the gods of the nations of *other* lands have not delivered their people out of mine hand, so shall not the God of Hezekiah deliver his people out of mine hand. Then they cried with a loud voice in the Jews' speech unto the people of Jerusalem that *were* on the wall, to affright them, and to trouble them; that they might take the city. (vv. 17–18)

Sennacherib knew that the most powerful weapon in his arsenal was fear. Fear had the ability to do what his chariots, swordsmen, and archers could not do. Fear could win a bloodless war. Sennacherib wanted to frighten the Jews into surrender by convincing them that they had no chance for success against him. All the facts seemed to be on his side. Every nation he invaded had cried out to their gods for

deliverance. What remained of those nations now belonged to him.

The story of Sennacherib's threat toward the land of Judah is recounted three times in the Scriptures, in 2 Kings 18–19, 2 Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 36–37. The strength of this triple witness cannot be overstated. Surely God did not intend for his people to miss the valuable lesson contained in these testimonies.

## THE TWO KINDS OF FEAR

There are two kinds of fear: healthy and unhealthy, or godly and ungodly. Godly fear, or “the fear of the Lord,” is the enlightened response to his sovereignty. We concede that it is better to “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God” (1 Pet. 5:6), than to “fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. 10:31).

Both the Old and New Testament teach that godly fear is essential to holy living. “What does the LORD thy God require of thee,” says Deuteronomy 10:12, “but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul?” “Let us have grace,” says Hebrews 12:28, “whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.” Only good can come from walking in the fear of the Lord. It enhances every aspect of our existence.

Godly fear is not instinctive to human nature. It must be learned. But in his wisdom, God instilled within all his creatures a kind of fear that is fundamental to our survival. This is the “flight or fight” response to danger, whether that danger is real or imagined. Facing a thief at the train station, or waiting offstage to address a crowd can trigger this reaction. The heart rate accelerates. The body sweats. Alertness and strength intensify.

On the other side of the spectrum is *ungodly* fear. Ungodly fear does more than make you nervous. This kind of fear incites panic, spurring you to react in fear rather than act in faith. As the saying goes, you jump from the frying pan into the fire. This is the kind of fear that Sennacherib used to intimidate the citizens of Judah.

Such fear is not born of the Holy Spirit. “God hath not given us the spirit of fear,” says 2 Timothy 1:7, “but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” Ungodly fear is an obstacle to holy living, the most formidable obstacle you will ever face. The devil himself cannot prevent you from stretching out your hand to receive the things of God, but ungodly fear can tie you up in knots. If you want to fight a good fight and finish your race, you must learn to overcome ungodly fear.

Before we can confront ungodly fear, we need to see it for what it is. Simply speaking, fear is the polar opposite of trust. If trust is up, then fear is down. Maybe this is why a man who trusts in God will lift his eyes toward heaven, but a man full of fear will stare down at his feet!

Even so, fear and trust are more similar than they are different. Most important, they both reside in the heart. “Though an host should encamp against me,” says Psalm 27:3, “my heart shall not fear.” “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart,” says Proverbs 3:5, “and lean not unto thine own understanding.”

Both fear and trust speculate about the future. Fear is dread, the expectancy of failure. Trust is confidence, the anticipation of success. Fear tells you that defeat is inevitable. Trust tells you that things will work out for good. But neither one has the power to guarantee the result it foretells. Fear and trust *predict* the outcome, but they cannot *produce* the outcome. That is why we can have false fears and misplaced trust. Giving your trust to a dishonest man does not make him trustworthy. Harboring suspicion towards an honest man does not make him dishonest.

The fear of cancer cannot cause a person to develop cancer. If that were true, there would be no such thing as “hypochondria.” A hypochondriac is preoccupied with the fear that he has contracted a dreadful illness. No medical evidence will convince him otherwise. Ironically, such a person can make himself sick with worry, but it is his anxiety rather than the imagined disease that affects him.

Both fear and trust register in the emotional center of the heart and not in the logical core of the mind. That is why fear does not have to “make sense” in order to be effective. Fears can be rational or irrational. The fear of falling is a rational fear. Falling from even a moderate height can cause injury or death. Refusing to leave your home for fear of falling meteors is an example of an irrational fear. Irrational fears are commonly called phobias. “Claustrophobia” is the fear of enclosed or confined spaces. This anxiety disorder can make a person feel like the walls are closing in on him. Of course, this fear cannot actually cause those walls to move.

It is harmful and misleading to assign too much power either to trust or fear. Yet this is precisely the kind of false teaching that has permeated the church and deceived people around the world. As a result, many Christians suffer from fear of fear. The so-called “law of positive and negative thinking” is an example of “teaching for doc-

trines the commandments of men.” Of course, such a presentation is made to sound biblical. A man can prove anything he wants to with the Bible, so long as he is allowed to manipulate the Scriptures. Such is the case of those who use this one statement made by Job to assert that man’s fears are the reason for his calamities:

For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me. (Job 3:25)

Can a person bring destruction upon himself and those around him simply by taking thought? Consider all that happened to Job, as reported by his four surviving messengers.

And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell *upon them*, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he *was* yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. (Job 1:14–19)

Are we to believe that one man’s fears conjured up these terrible events? Were Job’s children, servants and livestock at the mercy of his wayward thoughts, the bands of raiders the pawns of his dread? Let us see what God identified as the cause of Job’s adversity.

And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that *there is* none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause. (Job 2:3)

If fear had caused Job’s problems, his problems would not be “without cause.”

The lesson of the story of Job is not about fear. This book is the story of God’s mercy. Like so many Christians today, it seems that Job thought that God’s blessing was upon him because he was such

a good man. God therefore made it unmistakably plain to Job – and to people everywhere – that the blessing of God has everything to do with God’s prerogative for goodness, and nothing to do with man’s good works. God proved this by showing Job what his life would be like *without* his mercies.

*It is* of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. *They are new every morning: great is* thy faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22–23)

God is indebted to no man. He is not our servant. There is nothing we can do to entitle ourselves to his love, or to force him to bless us. The truth, so wonderfully expressed in Ezra 9:13, is that “our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve.” He is good to us simply because he is good. He is merciful to us because he is merciful.

Have you ever plucked an apple from a tree? The fact that you approached the tree did not cause the fruit to appear. It was already there waiting for you. When we walk in obedience to God, we do not *cause* a blessing; we *enjoy* a blessing that he has provided. Job realized this and repented of his egotistical thinking. Like every person who has *truly* had an encounter with the Most High, Job came away with a heightened awareness of both the Lord’s goodness and his own wretchedness. “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,” he said, “but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:5–6).

### TIME AND CHANCE HAPPENETH TO THEM ALL

The Bible does not directly explain why Job’s children met such a terrible end that day. However, the Scriptures indicate that some things happen in life without any apparent justification. Jesus made this lesson abundantly clear.

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (Luke 13:1–5)

Jesus never said why those Galilaeans or the eighteen men of Siloam died the dreadful way they did. Certainly it was not because of their fear! Perhaps the best explanation comes from King Solomon

who said, “Time and chance happeneth to them all” (Eccles. 9:11). Jesus simply made it clear that those men were no worse than any other men or women, and that unless people repent, their end will come just as unexpectedly, and just as dreadfully. Paul expressed this truth as well:

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. (1 Thessalonians 5:3)

Like many Americans, I can remember exactly what I was doing on September 11, 2001, when we learned that terrorists had hijacked four passenger airliners and were using them as missiles to attack our country. We watched the televised reports in horror and disbelief as the twin towers of the World Trade Center crumbled to the ground. In the days that followed, many people questioned why God would allow such a thing to happen. Prominent clergymen concluded that God had removed his hand of blessing from America on account of her many sins.

Now, I love my country, but that love does not blind me to her transgressions. Even so, are we to believe that those who died that day were “sinners above all men”? The question is not, “Why were those people consumed?” The question is, “Why are we not *all* consumed?” The answer is found only in God’s mercy. If it were not for the Lord’s mercies and infinite compassion, we would all perish.

We must exercise great caution before assigning cause and effect to the tragedies of life. Many people have been deeply hurt by someone erroneously analyzing the reason for their problem.

No one’s fears have the power to make bad things happen. The only thing fear can do is influence our behavior when bad situations arise. Once again, we see a similarity in fear and trust. They are both behavior modifiers. For better or worse, they affect your courage. Fear depletes your courage and leaves your heart in dismay. Trust fortifies your courage and gives you strength.

And David said to Solomon his son, Be strong and of good courage, and do *it*: fear not, nor be dismayed: for the LORD God, *even* my God, *will be* with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee, until thou hast finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD. (1 Chronicles 28:20)

## THE CURE FOR FEAR

Hosea 4:6 says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

Isaiah 5:13 says, "My people are gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge." Fear thrives on ignorance. So long as God's people live in ignorance, Satan has a great advantage over them.

Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices. (2 Corinthians 2:11)

Ignorance has caused many Christians to fear the spiritual gifts. Some fear that they are not good enough to receive these gifts. Others are afraid that they will not be able to use them correctly. Only the light of God's Word is able to eliminate these fears. That is why 1 Corinthians 12:1 says, "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant."

If ignorance is the cause of fear, then knowledge is the cure. The light of knowledge dispels the darkness of ignorance. Where there is light, there is no fear.

The LORD *is* my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD *is* the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

In a manner of speaking, I have made fear my friend. At least, I have learned to put my fears to good use. If I was driving my car and the oil light came on, I would not break the bulb so that I could not see it anymore. The oil light is not the problem; it is a problem *indicator*. The automobile designers put it there to show me when my car is running low on oil, so I can replenish the supply. Just the same, when I am afraid, my fear indicates to me that my heart is running low on trust. I must hide more of the Word in my heart until my trust in God returns to the level that it belongs.

The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, *and* my high tower. I will call upon the LORD, *who is worthy* to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. (Psalm 18:2-3)

### WHAT TIME I AM AFRAID

We have not yet concluded the story of Sennacherib and Hezekiah. You will remember that Sennacherib had stolen away the Jews' courage. Thankfully, Hezekiah and Isaiah knew what to do when they were afraid.

And for this *cause* Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven. (2 Chronicles 32:20)

Here is the great lesson of this story, and the reason I believe it



is told three times in the Bible. It is silly to think that we can eliminate fear from our lives, or that “spiritual” people are never afraid. It is how we react to fear that shows our spirituality.

Hezekiah did not try to hide his fear behind a mask of feigned assuredness. He got down on his knees with Isaiah, and together they prayed to the Lord for help.

“What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee,” says Psalm 56:3. Christian, hide these words deep in your heart! Here is your path to deliverance in your hour of distress.

In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. (v. 4)

Never be ashamed to confess your fear to your heavenly Father. “Pour out your heart before him,” says Psalm 62:8, “God is a refuge for us.” When ungodly fear has you ensnared, turn your heart to God and let the fear of the Lord set you free.

The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe. (Proverbs 29:25)

The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death. (Proverbs 14:27)

Hold fast to your faith in him, and soon the words of Psalm 34:4 will be your personal testimony: “I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.”

Truly the Lord delivered his people that day.

And the LORD sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. And when he was come into the house of his god, they that came forth of his own bowels slew him there with the sword. Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all *other*, and guided them on every side. (2 Chronicles 32:21–22)

And truly will he deliver all that put their trust in him.

And the LORD shall help them and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him. (Psalm 37:40)



## 5.

### THERE WAS WAR IN HEAVEN

In the Bible, the attributes of a good soldier and a champion athlete are used as standards of excellence in Christian living. To lead a virtuous life, we must both “war a good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18) and “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). Generally speaking, the imagery of the soldier relates to the believer’s outward strife against the powers of darkness, and the imagery of the athlete relates to his inward struggle toward self-mastery.

Of course, the spiritual race would be much easier to run if not for the spiritual war going on around us. On the other hand, if not for our personal struggle against sin, we would all be better soldiers of the Cross. Nevertheless, both realities are part of the Christian experience. It is neither the devil nor the carnal nature in man that is the sole cause of human suffering. Adam could not have been tempted to sin if there were no Tempter. For this cause, it is good that we understand the nature of the spiritual struggle that is going on both in and around us. That is the purpose of this lesson – to learn how this spiritual war began.

#### THE THREE HEAVENS

The Word of God opens with the words, “In the beginning God

created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). In our faith, we assert that God created man, and not the other way around. The fact that all people do not share this belief only serves to underscore the integrity of the Scriptures. The Bible plainly states that not all men will believe.

What if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect? God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar ... (Romans 3:3–4a)

Even among Christians, there are diverse opinions regarding the Genesis account of the Creation. Some Christians lean toward a literal interpretation of the creation story, while others prefer a more figurative rendering. In most cases, their disagreement hinges upon the perceived age of the earth. A literal interpretation of the Bible concludes that our planet is about six thousand years old. Modern scientists contend that physical evidence indicates the earth is billions of years old. That is quite a difference! But how old did Adam appear on his first day? The Bible infers that on the day he was created, Adam looked like a full-grown adult. How old did the earth look on the day it was created? Furthermore, how much did the flood of Noah’s day “age” the earth, when “the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered” (Gen. 7:19)? Such questions cannot be presently answered.

Let me say here (and perhaps I should have addressed this earlier) that I consider my duty as a Bible teacher to be just that – it is my aspiration simply to teach what the Bible says. What does the book of Genesis say about the Creation?

In the beginning God created “heaven,” an endless and open space filled with waters that the Bible calls “the deep.” In the midst of the deep stood the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:2)

God divided heaven into three distinct regions: the heaven, the heaven of heavens, and the atmosphere of the earth. These are all mentioned in Deuteronomy 10:14: “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD’S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is.” God placed a “firmament” in the midst of the waters. The firmament can be thought of as an enormous pocket of empty space, like a bubble, set in the midst of the waters of the deep. Standing alone inside this space was the planet earth.

## THERE WAS WAR IN HEAVEN

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. (Genesis 1:6)

Outside the firmament, in the waters above the heavens, are the “heavens of heavens.”

Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that *be* above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created. (Psalm 148:4–5)

In 2 Corinthians 12:2, Paul referred to the heaven of heavens as the *third* heaven. Here is the sanctuary of God. Here is his temple and throne.

For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the LORD behold the earth .... (Psalm 102:19)

The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD’S throne *is* in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. (Psalm 11:4)

The firmament itself is the *second* heaven, the home of all the galaxies. Genesis 1:8 says, “God called the firmament Heaven.” Today we call it “outer space.” Modern scientists may still wonder if the universe has a boundary, but Bible believers know that the fullness of the universe is contained within the firmament of heaven.

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament from the waters which *were* above the firmament: and it was so. (Genesis 1:7)

All the water under the firmament was gathered into one place, the seas of the earth.

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so. And God called the dry *land* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that *it was* good. (vv. 9–10)

Thousands of years before Sir Isaac Newton wrote down his theories about the law of gravity, Job 26:7 described the second heaven as “the empty place” where God “hangeth the earth upon nothing.” The accuracy of this revelation is even more remarkable when we learn that until the fourth day of the Creation, the earth sat alone in the universe (see Genesis 1:14–18). On that day, God created the sun, the moon, the planets, and the stars. Until that time, it was most certainly an empty space. How could these things be known, except the Creator revealed them? The Bible itself offers the best proof of its authenticity.

*It is* he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof *are* as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.... (Isaiah 40:22)

The area between outer space and the surface of the earth is the “open firmament of heaven,” or the *first* heaven. This is our atmosphere. Genesis 1:20 says, “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.” Simply stated, the first heaven is the sky above us, the second heaven is outer space, and the third heaven is the watery expanse on the far side of the firmament.

### THE HOST OF HEAVEN

In the beginning, God also created an army of heavenly angels. From Job 38:4–7, we learn that “the morning stars” – the angels – were with God when he laid the foundation of the earth.

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4–7)

The angels of God are called the “host” or army of heaven. The Bible does not say how many angels there are, only that there are too many to count. Jeremiah 33:22 tells us that “the host of heaven cannot be numbered.” Hebrews 12:22 speaks of “an innumerable company of angels.”

The angels of God are also called his “chariots.” Psalm 68:17 says, “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.” The use of this word “chariot” provides interesting insight into the events of 2 Kings 2:11, when the prophet Elijah was taken up to heaven in “a chariot of fire, and horses of fire.” This also adds light to Isaiah’s prophecy of the Second Coming of Christ: “Behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind” (Isa. 66:15).

Here a little and there a little, the Word of God dispenses information about the heavenly host of angels. According to Psalm 33:6, God created the angels “by the breath of his mouth.” Psalm 104:4 tells us that the angels are spirits, even as God is a Spirit (John 4:24). In Genesis 28:12, God showed Jacob a vision of a ladder that went from

the earth to heaven, with “the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” This vision showed Jacob that the angels of God are free to travel back and forth from the third heaven to earth.

The angels of God have different duties. Often, they serve as his messengers. In Exodus 3:2, the angel of the Lord spoke to Moses from a burning bush. Psalm 34:7 tells us that angels fight for and defend the people of God. Hebrews 1:14 says they are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.” In Matthew 18:10, Jesus taught that the angels of God give special attention to little children. Amazingly, they can even take on the appearance of ordinary human beings. Hebrews 13:2 tells us, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.”

There are only three angels whose names are recorded in the Bible: Michael, Gabriel, and Lucifer. Of these three, only Michael is clearly called “the archangel.”

Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. (Jude 1:9)

In the Scriptures’ only other reference to an archangel, the angel himself is unnamed.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first .... (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

An archangel is an angel of highest order with authority over other angels. Revelation 12:7 speaks of “Michael and his angels.” In the book of Daniel, Michael is called “the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people” (Dan. 12:1) and “Michael, one of the chief princes” (Dan. 10:13). Daniel also refers to the angel Gabriel, who came to the prophet in a vision. Centuries later, the angel revealed his exalted position when he told Zacharias, “I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God” (Luke 1:19). It was the angel Gabriel who brought glad tidings to Mary. It stands to reason that he is “the angel of the Lord” who came to Joseph as well (Matt. 1:20).

The third named angel, Lucifer, was distinguished by his splendor. In Ezekiel 28:12–14, he is personified as “the king of Tyrus.” Here he is called “the anointed cherub,” and described as “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.” His beauty outshined “every precious stone.”

Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and

say unto him, Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone *was* thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created. Thou *art* the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee *so*: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. (Ezekiel 28:12–14)

It is a reasonable conclusion (though not without controversy) that there were three “chief princes” or archangels of God, each commanding one third of heaven’s angels. Gabriel is the messenger; Michael is the warrior. Lucifer was the angel of light.

### THE FALL OF LUCIFER

When the angel of the Lord came to the shepherds to announce the birth of the Savior, “there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:13–14). Years later, the Savior himself seemed to contradict their words when he said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34).

There is no discrepancy between the words of the angels and the words of Christ. As Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Verse 8 tells us there is “a time of war, and a time of peace.” The angels spoke of a future time of peace. Jesus spoke of the times we live in now, a time of war. We will now learn how this war began.

The war in heaven began with Lucifer’s season of discontent. The archangel felt his position in God’s government belittled his magnificence. As his conceit grew, so did his lust for power. “I will ascend into heaven,” he said, “I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isa. 14:13–14). Lucifer rallied his forces and led one third of the angels of heaven in a rebellion against God. As Revelation 12:7 records, “There was war in heaven.”

The prophet Ezekiel revealed that Lucifer’s demise was his own doing. He himself corrupted the wisdom given to him by God.

Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness ... (Ezekiel 28:17a)



Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." This is an unbreakable law. Lucifer lifted himself up, and God cast him down to the earth.

... I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee. (Ezekiel 28:17b)

The great humiliation of Lucifer occurs in three stages. The first stage occurred thousands of years ago, while the other two are yet to come. First, he and his army were "cut down to the ground" and "cast out into the earth." Jesus said, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke 10:18).

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!  
*how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! (Isaiah 14:12)

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. (Revelation 12:7-9)

Cut down to the ground, this once-magnificent angel could no longer travel up and down Jacob's ladder. No more could he travel beyond the firmament to the third heaven. Like a bird whose wings have been clipped, Lucifer was chained to the earth, left to wander it "to and fro."

And the LORD said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it. (Job 1:7)

Peter and Jude also give insight into Lucifer's present situation.

...God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment .... (2 Peter 2:4)

And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. (Jude 1:6)

The entire army of rebellious angels was delivered into "chains of darkness." In addition, Lucifer and his spirits were "reserved unto judgment." Having been sentenced long ago, they now await the day of their ultimate punishment.

For now, the same darkness that is his prison is also his domain.

Satan's authority has been limited to the kingdom of darkness, but within that realm, he is lord and master. Those who live within his borders are subject to his rule. In that way, he is like a caged lion, posing no threat to those beyond his reach. But do not underestimate the lion's strength! Only a fool would stick his arm into his cage.

The second stage of Lucifer's humiliation will occur during the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. He will be cast into the bottomless pit, and bound for one thousand years.

And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. (Revelation 20:2-3)

Finally, on the day of their judgment, the devil and his angels will be cast into a lake of fire and brimstone to suffer eternal torment.

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (v. 10)

Secular history books and world maps are constantly being revised. Some revisions come as a result of new discoveries. For example, a world map produced a thousand years ago looks much different from one made today. The continents have not changed radically, but technological advances such as satellite imagery allow for greater detail. A global map that includes political borders must be updated frequently, as nations are continually being restructured and renamed. When Czechoslovakia divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993, relatively new maps became obsolete.

Legitimate revisions keep books accurate and up-to-date. But revisions are also made to retell history from a certain point of view. It has been said, "To the winners go the spoils, and the history books." One can imagine what history would say about America's War of Independence if England had successfully subdued the colonists. George Washington would be remembered as a traitor and not as a hero.

Only the devil could get away with writing a revisionist future! Today, most Christians believe that the fires of hell were created for the eternal torment of sinners, and that the devil and his angels have the job of administering that punishment. According to this view, hell is the devil's paradise, a place where his dreams come true. He is allowed to inflict punishment and pain forever, without restraint. Talk

about revisionism! What did Jesus say?

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels .... (Matthew 25:41)

People who have rejected the Savior will die “the second death” (Rev. 2:11), fulfilling the commandment that the wages of sin is death. It is there that the wicked shall perish.

But the wicked shall perish, and the enemies of the LORD *shall be* as the fat of lambs: they shall consume; into smoke shall they consume away. (Psalm 37:20)

This will not be a day of rejoicing, but rather of mourning. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. This is why God sent his Son – that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Say unto them, As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)

The everlasting fires of hell are for the devil and his angels. They are spirit beings and as such cannot die. They are the ones who will be “tormented day and night for ever and ever.”

In the country of the Gergesenes, Jesus encountered two men possessed by devils. Seeing him, they cried out, “What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Matt. 8:29). They knew the day of their punishment had not yet arrived. But the devil “knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev. 12:12). No one needs to rouse him to action. He is not wasting his time. If only the same could be said of the church!

Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. (Ephesians 5:14)

Let us wake up to the severity of our situation. Let us learn all we need to know about the spiritual warfare being waged in and around us. “Be sober, be vigilant,” says 1 Peter 5:8, “because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”



## 6.

# THE BODY, THE SOUL, AND THE SPIRIT

From the book of 1 Thessalonians, we learn that a saved person is a triune or three-part being. Paul wrote, “I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23). In this lesson we will learn about each of these parts: the body, the soul, and the spirit.

## THE EARTHEN VESSEL

Genesis 2:7 says that when God fashioned man’s body, he “formed him of the dust of the ground.” “Out of it wast thou taken,” said the Lord God to Adam, “for dust thou art and unto dust shalt thou return” (Gen. 3:19). Even those who deny the existence of God cannot refute this biological fact. Ninety-nine percent of the mass of the human body is made up of six elements – oxygen, carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium, and phosphorus – all of which are present in healthy soil.

The body gives us our physical form, our appearance. More importantly, the body is the container of life. In the Bible, the human body is called an “earthen vessel” (2 Cor. 4:7), “our earthly house” (2 Cor. 5:1), a “tabernacle” (2 Cor. 5:4), and a “temple” (1 Cor. 6:19). From these terms – vessel, house, tabernacle, and temple – we learn

that, in the eyes of God, the human body is merely a vessel, a container made to be filled.

In John 3:5, Jesus spoke of the natural human birth as being “born of water.” It should come as no surprise that this statement is wonderfully accurate. Within a pregnant mother’s uterus is the amniotic sac, a membrane lining that contains the fetus, and the fluid that cushions the fetus. This sac is commonly called the bag of waters. Shortly before giving birth, this membrane ruptures and the water breaks. The baby is “born of water.” Furthermore, almost 60% of an adult human body is made of water. About 83% of our blood is water. Far more complex than the world’s most powerful computer, the human brain is 70% water.

Romans 1:20 states that all man’s unbelief is “without excuse,” because the invisible things of God are “clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.” God’s greatest creation, the human machine, is undeniable proof of his absolute and perfect genius. Our eyes can distinguish up to one million shades of color, and retrieve more information than the largest telescope known to man. Our hearing is so sensitive that we can distinguish between hundreds of thousands of different sounds. The human body has over six hundred muscles. We use at least thirty every time we smile. Truly well stated are the words of the Psalmist:

I will praise thee; for I am fearfully *and* wonderfully made: marvellous *are* thy works; and *that* my soul knoweth right well.  
(Psalm 139:14)

## THE BREATH OF LIFE

Forming the body was only the first step in creating a living human being. The earthen vessel needed to be filled. This was accomplished when God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.”

And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. (Genesis 2:7)

Notice that it was God and not man who breathed the breath of life. “The Spirit of God hath made me,” says Job 33:4, “and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life.” God breathed life into Adam. Since then, the breath of life has passed on from generation to generation by way of human reproduction. A baby is a “living soul” long before he leaves his mother’s womb and breathes *his* first breath.

God breathed life into man and with that life, man became a living

soul. It is interesting that the Latin word *anima* is translated both “life” and “soul.” God animated man; he brought him to life. The term “soul” refers to the life that makes a body function, and also the resulting product – a living human being. Every living person *has* a soul. Every living person *is* a living soul.

In whose hand *is* the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind. (Job 12:10)

Like the body, the soul is given different names in the Bible. In Zechariah 12:1 and 1 Corinthians 2:11, it is called “the spirit of man within him.” Proverbs 20:27 says, “The spirit of man is the candle of the LORD, searching all the inward parts of the belly.” In Leviticus 17:11, it is called “the life of the flesh” which is “in the blood.” It is not the blood; it is *in* the blood. A body can have all the blood it needs and still be dead.

The spirit of man is like the electricity that powers a lamp. A lamp is a lamp whether or not it is plugged into the wall. Electricity makes it a lamp that *works*. The spirit of man is the energy that makes the human machine function. It is not an invisible “you” living in your body, any more than electricity is an invisible lamp living in the lamp.

The “spirit of man” in you is not your personality. Your personality is the product of your genetics and your life experiences. My sister tells me that I walk just like my father. My wife tells me that my sons walk just like me. It is amazing to think that this would be true even if I had never met my father, or my sons had never met me. Such are the wonders of genetics and heredity. Every one of us displays some of the same mannerisms as our great-great-great-grandparents.

Your soul is your life. In Matthew 16:26, Jesus asks, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” The word “soul” also refers to a man’s inner self, his conscience. When a man is talking to himself, he is talking to his soul.

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, *and* be merry. But God said unto him, *Thou* fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God. (Luke 12:16–21)

Scientists and philosophers have long tried to determine the difference between man and animals. Often they will cite man's intellect as the proof of his superiority. But whether a man has greater intelligence than an animal depends upon the kind of test being administered. Who do you suppose is more likely to survive a solo trek across the Serengeti in East Africa, a lion or me? Time and again, God uses animals – even insects – to point man to a greater wisdom.

There be four *things which are* little upon the earth, but they *are* exceeding wise: The ants *are* a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer; The conies *are but* a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks; The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands; The spider taketh hold with her hands, and is in kings' palaces.  
(Proverbs 30:24–28)

The difference between man and other creatures is found in the life within them. The spirit of man is not the same spirit as the spirit of the beast. God did not breathe the breath of life into animals. In Genesis 1:24, God commanded the earth to “bring forth the living creature.” When a man dies, the spirit of man returns to God. When an animal dies, the spirit of the beast returns to the earth.

Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? (Ecclesiastes 3:21)

This verse does not speak of life after death, or heaven and hell. “The spirit of man that goeth upward,” does not mean that all men are going to heaven. This verse speaks only of the life of the flesh returning to its source. The soul is immortal only in the sense that, when a man dies, that life force returns to God. The spirit of man is in you for the duration of your natural life here on earth.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Natural death occurs when the soul – that is to say, the life of the flesh, or the spirit of man – leaves the body. 1 Kings 17:17–22 tells of the occasion when Elijah raised a young boy from the dead. Verse 17 tells us the boy “fell sick; and his sickness was so sore, that there was no breath left in him.” Verse 22 tells us that when Elijah prayed, “the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived.” That which departed (his breath) returned (his soul). When Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, the Bible says *her* spirit – that is to say, the spirit of man – came again.

And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, say-



ing, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat. (Luke 8:54–55)

At the moment of a man's death, he "gives up the ghost." In Luke 23:46, we read that Jesus "gave up the ghost." In Acts 5:5, this same truth is written of Ananias. This "ghost" is not a phantom anymore than the Holy Ghost is a phantom. This ghost is the breath of life that returns to God.

Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. (Psalm 104:29)

His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. (Psalm 146:4)

### THE IMAGE OF GOD

God did more than give Adam and Eve a body and a soul. He also created them in his image.

So God created man in his *own* image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. (Genesis 1:27)

When people read that man was made in God's image, they often conclude that God must have a human appearance. In cathedral artwork around the world, the Father is portrayed looking like an older version of the Son. But if the image of God is a human body, why not portray God in a feminine form as well, since Eve was also created in his image?

The prophet Isaiah demonstrated the foolishness of assigning a recognizable form to God when he asked, "To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?" (Isa. 40:18). Romans 1:23 condemns the heresy of those that "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man." Romans 8:3 says that when God sent Jesus to the earth, he sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." Clearly, the image and likeness of God is not the image and likeness of man. What is the difference?

God and his angels share the same image and likeness. This can be seen in Genesis 1:26, when God said to the heavenly host, "Let us make man in our likeness, after our image." The image of God, and the image of the angels, is spirit.

Spirit is life. There is no such thing as "dead spirit." God and the angels are immortal, forever alive. When the Bible says God created man in his own image, it points to something far more significant than

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

his outward appearance. Adam and Eve were made in the image and likeness of the incorruptible God. In other words, they were immortal. If Adam and Eve had not eaten the forbidden fruit, they would both still be alive.

## 7.

### THOU SHALT SURELY DIE

Since the day he created man and woman, God has fostered a unique relationship with his children. Though he is all-powerful, he has never used that power to dominate their will. Though he knows it is in their best interest to obey him, he has never forced his children into subjection. Since time began, God has allowed every man to do “that which was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 17:6). God determined to offer counsel, but not exert control. This decision has been a two-edged sword to our heavenly Father. On one hand, he knows that those who follow him do so because they love him, not because they must. On the other hand, he has been forced to watch those he loves destroy themselves. Throughout the Bible, God’s heart aches for the rebelliousness of his children.

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master’s crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. (Isaiah 1:2–3)

Even before God made Eve, he defined the parameters of his relationship with his children. He put Adam in the Garden of Eden with commandment, but without restraint. It was up to Adam to choose the path he would take.

And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Genesis 2:15–17)

The ground does not punish a man for jumping down from a high tree, and neither does God punish a man for breaking his laws. Men punish themselves by their own foolishness. “Thine own wickedness shall correct thee,” says Jeremiah 2:19. But God is blameless. He warned Adam of the consequence of disobedience *before* Adam had the opportunity to disobey.

### THE DECEPTION OF EVE

If Adam and Eve had been left alone in the garden, they probably never would have fallen into trouble. Be that as it may, they were not alone. As we have previously read, Lucifer was “in Eden the garden of God” (Ezek. 28:13). He had only one reason for being there – to convince Adam to disobey God. It was in the Garden of Eden that the war that began in heaven fell to earth.

Lucifer is given many names in the Bible. In just one verse, Revelation 20:2, he is called “the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan.” Each name reveals an aspect of his sinister character. He is called the “serpent” because of his craftiness. Lucifer’s strength lies in his ability to deceive, to camouflage his evil intentions. He is subtle, not obvious. He knows he cannot force anyone to disobey God. He must convince us that disobedience is our own good idea.

It is worth mentioning that nowhere in the Bible do we read that the serpent spoke to Adam, even though the man was his primary target. Lucifer rightly calculated that he would need Eve’s help to bring down Adam.

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. (Genesis 3:1–3)

The description of Satan as “the serpent” does not refer to his appearance but rather to his character. How much easier it would be for us all if Satan would present himself as what he is! Alas, subtlety

is his specialty. 2 Corinthians 11:14 says we should not marvel at the deceptiveness of his ministers, “for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” We have already read from Ezekiel 28:13 that when Lucifer was “in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering.” Without a doubt, it was Lucifer’s beauty that captured Eve’s attention.

Lucifer began by testing Eve’s knowledge of God’s command, a test she failed miserably. To be fair, just as there is no record of the serpent talking to Adam, up to this point there is no record of God talking to Eve. Most likely, God made Adam responsible to teach her the rules of the Garden. (One can imagine that after it was all over, she said Adam was a poor communicator, and he said Eve was a bad listener!) In the end, Eve was wrong about both the commandment and the consequence of the transgression. How true the proverb that God’s people are destroyed for lack of knowledge! Quickly, Satan moved in to exploit the opening that Eve had left him.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. (vv. 4–5)

Eve’s ignorance emboldened Satan to tell an absolute lie, “Ye shall not surely die.” Before he can convince us to sin, Satan must first belittle the *risk* of sin. In his subtlety, he implied that God had a different reason for denying Adam and Eve the fruit of that tree. You can imagine his words. “Eve, dear, you are not being *protected*. You are being *suppressed*.” Lucifer tempted Eve with the same prize that had caused his own downfall: “I will be like the most High!” he had once boasted. “Ye shall be as gods!” he told Eve.

Temptation has no power over those who are content. Before he can do his evil work, Satan must first sow the seeds of ingratitude. The serpent redirected Eve’s thoughts away from the joys of paradise to the one thing that she was denied. Through the power of insinuation, he played her like a violin. All he needed was for her to *consider* that God had not been honest with her. The fruit certainly looked harmless enough.

And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (v. 6)

Eve plucked the fruit off the tree and took a bite. Perhaps the fact

that she did not immediately fall over dead convinced her that the serpent had told the truth. Then, just as Satan planned, Eve offered a bite to Adam, “and he did eat.”

Most people hold Eve responsible for man’s fall. The Bible tells it differently. Poor Eve was deceived. Her eyes were blinded to the truth, and she ate the fruit and offered a piece to her husband. As 2 Corinthians 11:3 says, “The serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety.” As for the man, “Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression” (1 Tim. 2:14).

Adam disobeyed God with his eyes wide open. Perhaps the thought of spending eternity without his beloved wife was too much for him to bear. Whatever the reason, he chose to disobey God. Fully aware of the consequence of his action, he ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Immediately, Adam and Eve realized that something terrible had changed inside them. “And the eyes of them both were opened,” says Genesis 3:7, “and they knew that they were naked.”

### THE RESULT OF ADAM’S SIN

Going back one chapter, Genesis 2:25 says, “They were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.” Why were Adam and Eve now so intensely aware of their nudity? This leads to a second question: Of all the inhabitants on this earth, why do only human beings wear clothes?

Rules of fashion and modesty differ from culture to culture. The basic reason human beings began to wear clothes was for survival. Of all God’s creatures, mankind is the most ill equipped for life on earth. His bare skin provides almost no protection from the heat or cold. Walking in an upright position exposes his most vulnerable parts. His fingernails and teeth are practically useless as weapons. Human beings are neither particularly fast nor strong.

Incredibly, none of this had mattered only moments before. Adam and Eve were going to live forever, and nothing could possibly hurt them. But now they were faced with a brand-new concept: their own mortality. The smallest thing – a spider bite, a virus, even the passing of time – could kill them. They were helpless, weak, and exposed. They were naked.

Thankfully, there was one covenant that man’s disobedience did not break. God had given man dominion over “every living thing that moveth upon the earth.”

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Genesis 1:28)

This covenant was confirmed to Noah and his sons after the Flood.

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth *upon* the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. (Genesis 9:1-2)

The “dominion” promised Adam and Noah concerned man’s status among the creatures of the earth. This authority remains intact today. If not, man would have lost the contest for the “survival of the fittest” long ago.

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all *things* under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, *and whatsoever* passeth through the paths of the seas. (Psalm 8:6-8)

For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind.... (James 3:7)

For the first time in their existence, Adam and Eve experienced fear and shame. All they could think to do was hide. First they tried to hide their nakedness. They “sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons” (Gen. 3:7). When that did not relieve their anxiety, “they hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden” (v. 8).

Even in their terrified condition, Adam and Eve knew they faced something far worse than death. Now they knew what it was like to be separated from God. How terrible their sense of loss must have been! You and I have never known the kind of intimate fellowship with God that Adam and Eve experienced on a daily basis. We can empathize with David’s plea when he wrote, “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11), but Adam and Eve had never known anything but God’s presence! How dark their situation must have seemed!

What caused this terrible breach? It was not Adam’s transgression, but rather the *result* of his transgression that caused this sepa-

ration from God. Adam was now a changed man, and not for the better! Adam had been created in the image of God, but now he was a mortal creature. Just as God had warned, on the day he ate of that fruit, Adam died. He was now “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1). His imminent physical death was almost a little thing when compared to his catastrophic spiritual condition.

In Matthew 22:32, Jesus said, “God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” There is no greater separation than life and death, and now Adam was spiritually dead, fully separated from God. So terrible was Adam’s sin that even those “that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression” (Rom. 5:14) were now subject to its consequence. From the loins of Adam came forth the entire human race, born not in God’s image, but his.

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat a *son* in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth.  
(Genesis 5:3)

Man’s separation from God has never been a matter of his morality but of his mortality. Even if it were possible for a man to fill his life with only good works, he would still run out of days. There is, as Ecclesiastes 3:2 says, “a time to be born, and a time to die.” But God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. It is because of our mortality that we are naked before God.

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in *this* tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.  
(2 Corinthians 5:2–4)

The human race was left in a terrible predicament. Because of Adam’s sin, the sentence of death fell upon all his progeny. All men are born mortal, of flesh and blood, and 1 Corinthians 15:50 declares that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” There was nothing man could do to change his fate. Only God could save him from eternal damnation.



## 8.

### FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

Soon after King Solomon dedicated the temple in Jerusalem, the Lord came to him in the night with a wonderful promise. “If my people,” he said, “which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14).

The Lord’s willingness to forgive the sins of his people is fundamental to our faith. “As far as the east is from the west,” says Psalm 103:12, “so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.” Looking back to the Garden of Eden, it is safe to assume that after Adam realized his mistake, he asked God for forgiveness. Why could not God simply forgive Adam and Eve and allow them to start over again? Why is he able to forgive you and me? Understand this and you will never take it for granted that God pardons your sins.

#### THE PENALTY FOR SIN

Being fair and just, God must enforce the laws he makes without prejudice or respect of persons. God himself established the penalty for sin when he told Adam, “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17). “The wages of sin is death,” says

Romans 6:23. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die,” agrees Ezekiel 18:4. Adam’s transgression left God without option. His death penalty could neither be dismissed nor appealed. The stain of sin could only be washed away by the shedding of blood.

And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. (Hebrews 9:22)

The justice of God allowed for the death penalty to be paid in substitution, in a sacrificial offering. The first sacrifice of this kind took place while Adam and Eve were still in Eden. You will recall that upon discovering their nakedness, the disgraced couple sewed crude coverings for themselves.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. (Genesis 3:7)

By the work of their hands, Adam and Eve tried to conceal their sinful condition. Their handmade aprons forever symbolize man’s feeble attempt to hide his sins, and make himself acceptable before God. In the eyes of the Lord, this only adds sin to sin.

Woe to the rebellious children, saith the LORD, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin .... (Isaiah 30:1)

When God covers a man, it is with “the garments of salvation” and “the robe of righteousness” (Isa. 61:10). When man himself tries to cover his sins, it is as if he wraps himself in soiled rags.

But we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

God did not allow Adam and Eve to remain in their aprons. He changed their wardrobe so they could once again stand before him without shame.

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. (Genesis 3:21)

You cannot remove the skin from a living animal. This animal had to first die. But the animal was not the guilty party – it was Adam who owed his life for his sin. Adam and Eve were redeemed by innocent blood. They were released from the debt they owed. This first sacrifice, and every sacrifice that followed throughout the Old Testament, pointed to a greater truth – the sacrifice of God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

## THE PAYMENT FOR SIN

As Moses led the Children of Israel on the long journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, the people grew weary and resentful. They complained bitterly to God and Moses saying, "Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness?" The righteous anger of the Lord was kindled, and he "sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died." The living begged Moses to seek God's forgiveness on their behalf. God told Moses, "Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live." The man of God obeyed his Master and "made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived" (see Numbers 21:4–9).

Centuries passed. Not another word was said about the "serpent of brass" until the day King Hezekiah destroyed it.

He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan. (2 Kings 18:4)

Finally, Jesus himself revealed the meaning of the serpent on the pole.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:14–16)

John 3:16, the most famous verse in the Bible, was not initially spoken before multitudes. Like so many of the events recorded in the Gospel of John, this revelation was first voiced in a private conversation between Jesus and one other person; here, a ruler of the Jews named Nicodemus, who came to Jesus under the cover of night. Many ministers are tempted to judge the success of their campaigns by the size of their audience. To do so is to share the sin of David when he numbered the people of Israel and Judah (see 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21). Jesus said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). He does not demand that we produce an adequate crowd before he will join himself to us.

“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” said Jesus, “even so must the Son of man be lifted up.” This is extraordinary! Yes, certain animals are used to characterize Christ. He is the Lion of Judah; he is the Lamb of God. But who would think to portray Jesus as a serpent? A serpent is symbolic of sin! But this is exactly what Jesus said, and this is exactly what God intended. The serpent on the pole was a picture of our Savior lifted up on the cross.

And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.  
(John 12:32–33)

The serpent of brass was a picture of the one made to be sin for us. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.  
(2 Corinthians 5:21)

By an act of free will, Adam became a sinner. By an act of free will, Jesus Christ, “the last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45), became sin for us. For our blessing, he became a curse.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree ... (Galatians 3:13)

No evil thought had ever passed through his mind. He never did a single act that did not resound in righteousness and holiness. Yet, in order to fulfill his Father’s will, Jesus deliberately became an unclean thing. He did more than carry our sins. He *became* sin for us. This was the cup he so trembled at the thought of putting to his lips, when he “fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matt. 26:39).

It was not the tortures of the Roman army that caused Jesus to look for another way to fulfill his mission. As horrific as they were, those infernal devices were in use long before Calvary. Countless others had suffered their torment. Thousands of men died by crucifixion before and after Jesus went to the cross.

Jesus was not afraid to die. He knew his death would be only momentary. “Destroy this temple,” he said, “and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). But the thing required of the Savior was so dreadful that it could never be asked of any other man. In that cup was the sin of all mankind, all that is an abomination before God, despised and detestable. Jesus had to swallow every drop of that deadly poison. By his own volition he became a cursed thing, forsaken in the eyes of the Father that he loved. He took upon himself all that we are so that

“we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

The sacrificial offerings presented year after year by the high priest were only “a shadow of good things to come” (Heb. 10:1), “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24). But as Abraham said to Isaac, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb” (Gen. 22:8). The lamb that God provided was his only begotten Son.

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation *received* by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.... (1 Peter 1:18–19)

Righteous judgment requires a payment for every sin. That is what makes the sacrifice of Christ so extraordinary. Jesus is the “author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:9). He came to bring *eternal* salvation, not temporal. He is “the author and finisher of our faith” (Heb. 12:2); the “Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty” (Rev. 1:8). Our salvation is perfect because the sacrifice was perfect. The sacrifice of Christ was “once for all,” one sacrifice “for ever” (Heb. 10:10, 12).

We perceive that our redemption was complete when Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30). But in the eyes of God, Jesus is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8).

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

Everyone who looked up to the serpent upon the pole was saved from death, the penalty for sin. All who look to the cross of Jesus Christ and believe on him are saved from eternal damnation and given everlasting life. Whether they live before or after “the days of his flesh” (Heb. 5:7), “whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom. 10:13).

## THE VICTORY OVER SIN

The wages of sin were not simply dismissed. They were fully paid in a most terrible way. Now the door was open for God to forgive sins,

in strict adherence to the rules he had established. God was now able to reconcile man back to himself in a way that ensured that man could never be lost again. This was accomplished by a new birth, a birth of the Spirit of God.

Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. (John 3:5–7)

That which is born of the flesh is corruptible flesh. If it is corruptible, it is going to die.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. (1 Corinthians 15:50)

But that which is born of the Spirit is incorruptible spirit. A new creature is born of incorruptible seed.

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (1 Peter 1:23)

By the miracle of the new birth, a new man is born in a new image, the image of God. 1 Corinthians 15:49 promises that “as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.” Colossians 3:10 tells of “the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” This new man cannot be corrupted, for that which is born of God cannot sin.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. (1 John 3:9)

Many people are confused by this verse, knowing full well that Christians sin continually. Hebrews 12:1 speaks of “the sin which doth so easily beset us.” 1 John 1:8 says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” It seems like quite a contradiction!

The explanation is plain: I, Tim Sullivan, am not *born of God*. I am flesh born of flesh, born of my parents, Howard and Namiko Sullivan. By the grace of God, I am born *again* of God. That which is “born of the Spirit” is a “new man,” a “new creature” born of God. This new creature *cannot* sin; neither is it held accountable for the sins of my flesh. Therefore it will live forever.

Jesus called true believers “the children of the resurrection,” say-

ing, “Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God” (Luke 20:36). By way of the new birth, man overcomes the one thing that no mortal man could ever overcome – death. Therefore, whatsoever is *born of God* overcomes the world!

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, *even* our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:4–5)

To all that believe, Jesus is the door to everlasting life. “I am the door,” he said, “by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). Confessing what *we* did leads to repentance. Confessing what *he* did leads to salvation.

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. (Romans 10:9–10)

Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. (1 John 4:15)

Our salvation was not forged by the hands of man, but by the perfect work of Jesus Christ. It is accomplished by his good works and not our own.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

1 John 2:2 says that Jesus died for “the sins of the whole world.” By his death on the cross, he fully paid the penalty for all our sins – past, present, and future. For this reason, “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him” (Heb. 7:25).

“God is not the God of the dead, but of the living,” said Jesus. When man died spiritually, it seemed like death’s victory was irreversible. But God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten Son to die for us. He was lifted up on the cross, just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness. By his sacrificial death, Jesus “abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). As Romans 14:9 triumphantly declares, “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.” This complete victory over death will be manifest when he returns.

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:52-54)

Our salvation was a free gift, but it was not without cost. You can be sure that God will never forget the terrible price he paid so that he could forgive our sins. Neither should we.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)



## 9.

### THE ENMITY

A wise man once pondered the apparent injustices of life and said, “There is a vanity which is done upon the earth; that there be just men, unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked; again, there be wicked men, to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous” (Eccles. 8:14). These same sentiments are echoed by believers and unbelievers alike. If God is almighty and God is love, why do people suffer in this world? Only those who understand the spiritual war can answer this question satisfactorily.

#### THE CONSEQUENCE OF THE FALL

The pleasant life that Adam and Eve had known in paradise was over. Because of Adam’s transgression, life on earth became much more difficult. For the first time, human beings experienced pain and suffering. Even the relationship between husband and wife was affected.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. (Genesis 3:16)

Eve was created to give companionship and help to her husband.

“It is not good that the man should be alone,” God said, “I will make him an help meet for him” (Gen. 2:18). But after the transgression, the woman was put under the authority of the man. This foreshadowed the future relationship between Jesus and his bride.

For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so *let* the wives *be* to their own husbands in every thing. (Ephesians 5:23–24)

Women were created neither as beasts of burden for men, nor as masters over them. The covenant relationship between Jesus and his bride is rooted in love, honor, and respect. This is the kind of relationship that God desires for all married couples.

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with *them* according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered. (1 Peter 3:7)

Adam’s sin had serious repercussions. But the most severe consequence came upon the one who started all the trouble, the tempter Satan.

And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou *art* cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life ... (Genesis 3:14)

When two “alpha” wolves fight for the leadership of their pack, the loser crawls away on his belly in defeat. This well describes the judgment that befell Lucifer. The once proud and haughty archangel would now crawl in the dirt before God. “Dust shall be the serpent’s meat,” says Isaiah 65:25. The enemies of God “shall lick the dust,” says Psalm 72:9. The prophet Isaiah marveled at the totality of Satan’s defeat and said, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer!” (Isa. 14:12).

## AFTER HIS KIND

Having lost the battle for supremacy in heaven, Lucifer set his mind to rule in the kingdom of man. But the devil’s ambition would not go unchallenged. God told Lucifer, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15).

With these words, God defined the spiritual conflict that began in Eden and continues unto this day. On one side are the devil and his seed. On the opposing side are the woman and her seed. God put

“enmity” between them. Enmity is hatred; it is the opposite of “amity” or friendship. “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?” asks James 4:4. “Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”

There are four participants in the conflict: the devil, his seed, the woman, and her seed. The identities of these four will be clarified, but only after an important biblical precept is established: “after his kind.”

The biblical concept of the seed is instituted in the first chapter of Genesis and sustained throughout the Scriptures. The seed is the basis of reproduction. The seed ensures that the offspring will be the same type as its genetic parent. Every form of vegetation and every creature of the earth, sea, and sky produce seed “after his kind.”

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. (Genesis 1:11)

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that *it was good*. (v. 21)

This precept also applies to things of heaven and earth.

As *is* the earthy, such *are* they also that are earthy: and as *is* the heavenly, such *are* they also that are heavenly.  
(1 Corinthians 15:48)

The law of the seed governs both the natural and supernatural realms. Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). This is true whether the spirit is holy or unholy.

## THE DEVIL AND HIS SEED

The devil, “that old serpent” (Rev. 12:9), is a spirit, an unholy spirit. His seed is “after his kind.” That old serpent spawns unclean spirits that are called serpents or vipers. The devil’s seed of Genesis 3:15 is the “generation of vipers.” This generation is invisible to the natural eye. Our eyes can only see the manifestation of their presence in the people they influence or possess. But those with “eyes to see” can see beyond the veil of the flesh.

In Matthew twenty-three, Jesus rebuked not only the scribes and Pharisees, but also the “generation of vipers” that possessed them.

Speaking to the men, Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (v. 27). Speaking to the devils inside the men, Jesus said, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (v. 33). When John the Baptist spoke to “the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him,” he also confronted the devils that were present. “O generation of vipers,” he said, “who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Luke 3:7).

In John 8:44, Jesus told a group of Pharisees, “Ye are of your father the devil.” Jesus was not suggesting that these men were physically born of the devil. The men were flesh, not spirit. Jesus identified the devil as their *spiritual* father, in the same way that spiritually, Abraham is “the father of us all” who believe (Rom. 4:16). The devil was their father in the same sense that the devil is the father of all lies.

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. (John 8:44)

When Paul confronted a sorcerer named Elymas, he rebuked the unclean spirit that possessed him. “O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness,” he said to the unclean spirit, “wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?” (Acts 13:10). The man was only a vessel. The “child of the devil” that inhabited him was the devil’s seed.

1 John 3:10 is a verse that seems to contradict the precept that flesh is flesh, and spirit is spirit. It is written, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil; whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10). In this verse, “of” means “belonging to.” Unsaved people are not born of the devil, but they do belong to him. Because of Adam’s sin, all people are born as subjects in the kingdom of darkness. Only salvation can remedy this tragic situation. As Colossians 1:13 says, God “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.”

With the promise of salvation, ownership is transferred and we are turned “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18). Saved people are the rightful property of God Almighty, purchased by the blood of the Lamb. “Ye are all the children

of light, and the children of the day,” says 1 Thessalonians 5:5, “we are not of the night, nor of darkness.”

Flesh cannot be born of spirit and neither can spirit be born of flesh. That is why unsaved people are never called the “seed” of the devil. They are called “the children of this world” (Luke 16:8), “the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), and “the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). They are not called a “generation of vipers,” but they are called “a perverse and crooked generation,” and “a very froward [stubbornly contrary] generation” (Deut. 32:5, 20).

### THE WOMAN AND HER SEED

The woman of Genesis 3:15 points first to Eve, “the mother of all living” (Gen. 3:20). Man of flesh and blood is characterized as “man that is born of a woman” (Job 14:1). All human beings are the children of Eve because God “hath made of one blood all nations of men” (Acts 17:26).

The woman of Genesis 3:15 also represents the women that carried the ancestral line of Christ, from Eve all the way to Mary, the mother of Jesus. The woman is *the women*. She is Sarah, the wife of Abraham and the mother of Isaac, of whom God said, “I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (Gen. 17:19). The woman is *the nation*. She is Rachel and Leah, “which two did build the house of Israel” (Ruth 4:11). And of course, she is Mary, the mother of our Lord. Finally, the woman is *Jerusalem, the Bride of Christ*. She is “Jerusalem which is above ... which is the mother of us all” (Gal. 4:26).

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (Revelation 21:2)

The phrase “her seed” is a deliberate misnomer used by God to highlight a greater truth. Biologically, the woman does not provide the seed. The father produces the seed that fertilizes the mother’s egg. The phrase “her seed” foretells the miraculous conception and birth of the Savior. Though Jesus was born of a woman, he was begotten of God. “But when the fulness of the time was come,” says Galatians 4:4, “God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law.”

The promise of “her seed” synchronizes with the covenant God made with Abraham about two thousand years later. Though she was barren, God promised a son to Abram and his wife Sarai. From that seed, God promised an innumerable nation.

And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. (Genesis 15:5)

The seed promised to Abraham is the promised seed of Christ.

Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. (Galatians 3:16)

With the promise of the seed comes the promise of the nation, “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet. 2:9). This holy nation is populated by people “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible” (2 Pet. 1:23).

And if ye *be* Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Galatians 3:29)

After the flesh, we are the children of Adam and Eve. But after the Spirit, we are the children of Jerusalem our mother, and Abraham, “the father of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:11).

The conflict between the devil and the woman is retold in Revelation 12:13, where it is written, “And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.” The war comes to its apex during the final years of the Great Tribulation. Verse 17 says, “The dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

Jesus told of the enmity between the devil and his seed, and the woman and her seed, in the parable of the tares of the field.

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked *one*; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. (Matthew 13:36–40)

“So shall it be in the end of this world,” said Jesus. God told Satan that the woman’s seed would “bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This prophecy was fulfilled in part when Christ was “bruised for our iniquities” at Calvary (Isa. 53:5).

## THE ENMITY

The complete fulfillment of this prophecy is yet in our future, for “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom. 16:20). For now, the enmity between the powers of darkness and the children of light is the reason for all the injustices of life. Until that blessed day when Jesus “hath put all enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25), we will see the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper here on earth.

He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly  
Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. (Revelation 22:20)





## 10.

### THE SIN THAT DWELLETH IN ME

A man learning to sail a boat faces certain challenges. His first task is to learn the basic operation of his watercraft. He must learn how to maneuver the sails in order to catch the wind, and how to control the rudder that steers the boat. If he plans to sail in unfamiliar territory, he must learn to read a nautical map. These things can be studied before he ever leaves the shore. However, once he has launched his boat into the water, his challenge escalates. Sailing a boat is not like driving a car down the highway. The “road” beneath the boat is in a constant state of change. Currents of wind and water try to impose a will of their own. It is fairly easy to sail downwind, or drift with the current, but the challenge of sailing is to go where you want to go, and not where the currents want to take you. The more contrary the currents, the greater the challenge.

The boatman’s challenge is first internal and then external. Before he can master the wind and waves, he must learn to govern his vessel. In this way, his challenge is very similar to the struggles facing a Christian. Just as a sailor must master the fundamentals of seamanship before he can master the wind and waves, a Christian must learn to withstand the power of sin in his own life before he can stand against the powers of darkness in the world.

## ENMITY AGAINST GOD

The enmity between the children of light and the spirits of darkness was not the only conflict born on the day of man's fall from grace. Through the disobedience of Adam, "sin entered into the world" (Rom. 5:12), making its home in the heart of man, corrupting and debasing him. Man became carnal, compelled by things "earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15). Self-satisfaction – "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16) – became more important to him than pleasing God. Men began to view God as nagging and intrusive, and preferred their own counsel to his. God's relationship with his creation became filled with strife.

And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. (Genesis 6:3)

The enmity between man and God is rooted in the absolute disagreement of flesh and Spirit. Carnal man would not – indeed *could* not – put himself in subjection to God. It was like asking a cannonball to float on water. "The carnal mind is enmity against God," says Romans 8:7, "for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." In his corruption, man considered what was rational and intellectual more reliable than religious "foolishness."

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

All things considered, we are hard pressed to fathom the "kindness and love of God our Saviour" shown us through his Son.

For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, *and* hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared...That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:3–4, 7)

## THE WAR IN MY MEMBERS

A Christian is the product of two distinct births. In a manner of speaking, new wine has been put in old bottles. After the flesh, we are born of corruptible flesh. After the Spirit, we are born of incorruptible Spirit. These two opposing natures war within us, each trying to dominate the other. The carnal nature rejects all things holy, and the holy nature abhors all forms of carnality.

## THE SIN THAT DWELLETH IN ME

For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. (Galatians 5:17)

By a man's faith in the accomplished work of Christ, "death hath no more dominion over him" (Rom. 6:9). But in this life, you must take heed that "sin shall not have dominion over you" (v. 14). So long as you live in the flesh, you will struggle against the flesh.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul examined the inner battle of flesh and spirit. He personalized the struggle, speaking on the behalf of Christians everywhere. Paul attested that his inability as a carnal creature to walk according to God's spiritual laws affirmed both the good of the law and his rightful condemnation by it.

For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that *it is* good. (Romans 7:14-16)

Furthermore, Paul identified the *cause* of his failure. It was not a deficiency of character or moral ambiguity that plagued him. It was not that he lacked the *will* to do good. As a carnal creature, he lacked the *ability* to do good! Why? There was no good in him!

Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (vv. 17-20)

Paul did not make excuse for disobedience to God; he identified the cause of it – the "sin that dwelleth in me." With this, he exposed the war between the "law in my members" (the desires of the flesh) and "the law of my mind" (the Christian conscience).

I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (vv. 21-23)

The carnal man is bound to serve the law of sin. The spiritual man can do none other than the works of righteousness. This is our wretched condition so long as we abide in the flesh, "the body of this death."

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So

then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (vv. 24–25)

ARE YE NOW MADE PERFECT BY THE FLESH?

In order to live righteously, we must subdue the will of the flesh. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die,” says Romans 8:13, “but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” But how do we accomplish this? Do we dare imagine that Jesus intended for this admonition to be taken literally?

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast *them* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire. (Matthew 18:8–9)

Paul said, “In my flesh dwelleth no good thing.” If we were to remove all parts of the body that cause offense, no part would remain intact! The figurative admonition of Jesus parallels the literal truth expressed by Paul. It is the sinful deeds of the flesh that must be overcome. Still, the question lingers – how is this achieved?

We cannot overcome the flesh by the flesh. This has been the folly of so-called “holy men” and ascetics throughout the ages, those who believe that the soul can be purified by the cleansing of the body. Paul condemned such practices as inane. “Are ye so foolish?” he asked, “having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3). As Jesus said, it is not what enters a man that defiles him. He is defiled by what already exists in his heart!

And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, *it* cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats? And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man. (Mark 7:18–23)

Temperance is a Christian virtue. “Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things,” says 1 Corinthians 9:25. But temperance is a means to an end, not an end in itself; temperance is

required of those who would serve the Lord. Temperance for the sake of being temperate is only a vain religion.

All ritualistic religions are rooted in the perfecting of the flesh, according to “the commandments and doctrines of men.”

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh. (Colossians 2:20–23)

What results is a display of piety that cannot conceal the practitioner’s self-satisfaction for having out-suffered, out-prayed or out-fasted his fellows. Upon closer examination, such “wisdom” is exposed as carnal, crafted in homage to man’s own will. It is in our wretchedness as sinful creatures that we take pride in our professed humility. In the end, rituals of denial do not supplant the appetites of the flesh; in fact, they indulge them. The man himself remains unchanged. A hungry dog is still a dog.

The problem is man’s sinful heart. As Proverbs 20:9 rhetorically asks, “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” Though we may *desire* to mortify the deeds of the flesh, we do not of ourselves have the *means* to do so.

Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. (Jeremiah 13:23)

David’s prayer of Psalm 51:10 must be ours as well. “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” he said, “and renew a right spirit within me.” We are getting closer to the answer, but the question still remains. How is this accomplished?

### CASTING DOWN STRONGHOLDS

The enmity between the flesh and spirit is at the forefront of the battle for Christian supremacy in our lives. However, this war is not fought in a vacuum. Two powerful forces are continually at work to influence the outcome: the “prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2), and “God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). Though the power of God is infinitely superior to the power of Satan, God is constrained to occupy no more room in our lives than we willingly yield. For the most part, this puts him at a disadvantage.

“The place is too strait [confined] for me,” he cries. “Give place to me that I may dwell” (Isa. 49:20). The place he wants to dwell is in our hearts. We must conquer that land for him.

In his first act as the king of Israel, David made war on the Jebusite stronghold of Zion. The Jebusites taunted David as they watched his approach, boasting that their fortress was so strong that the blind and lame could defend it. But David was acting in one accord with God. Psalm 132:13 says, “For the LORD hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.” Though the Jebusites’ fortress was powerful and imposing, it could not withstand the will of God. “Nevertheless,” says 2 Samuel 5:7, “David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David.”

In the New Testament, we read Paul’s prayer that “Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith” (Eph. 3:17). Your heart is your innermost being. Under the tutelage of the carnal man, it has been fortified with strongholds against such “foolish” notions as faith, hope, and love. Wicked imaginations and wayward thoughts have built these strongholds with bricks of hard-heartedness and mortar of fear. In symbolism, your heart is Zion. Just as God desired Zion for his habitation, even so the King of Glory wants to establish his throne in the innermost region of your heart.

Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden *part* thou shalt make me to know wisdom. (Psalm 51:6)

Before the Lord can reign in your heart, those strongholds must be pulled down. But as Jesus said, “A house divided against itself shall not stand” (Matt. 12:25). The carnal mind will not seek its own abdication from the throne! We cannot liberate our heart with the armaments of the flesh. “For though we walk in the flesh,” says 2 Corinthians 10:3, “we do not war after the flesh.” Only spiritual power can bring down the strongholds that stand between your heart and Christ. As promised, God has supplied us with everything we need for the task. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal,” says verse 4, “but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.” With these spiritual weapons, we are able to cast down wicked imaginations and harness wayward thoughts.

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:5–6)

The carnal mind cannot be rehabilitated. It must be cast down, thought by wayward thought. That is the purpose of the spiritual weapons of our warfare. With these weapons, we conquer our personal Zion for Christ.

Ephesians 4:8 says that when Jesus “ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” Christ has already led captivity captive. There is no stronghold that can resist him. He has given us gifts, the weapons of our warfare, which enable us to stand in that same irresistible power.

When the prophet Nahum prophesied of the destruction of Ninevah, he said, “All thy strong holds shall be like fig trees with the firstripe figs: if they be shaken, they shall even fall into the mouth of the eater” (Nah. 3:12). When we walk in the power of God, the strongholds of sin that surround our heart will fall like overripe figs. This is our way to victory, as Zechariah 4:6 says, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”





## 11.

### TRANSFORMED

Our spiritual growth as Christians has certain parallels to our physical development as human beings. We enter this world as infants, not as adults. Similarly, we are born into the kingdom of heaven as “babes in Christ,” no matter our age the day we are born again. Physically and spiritually, we must grow into maturity.

Over time, a human baby learns that the strange sounds coming from his parent’s mouth are not only meant to amuse him, but to communicate with him. He learns that these sounds are words, each with a particular meaning. He begins to mimic those sounds he hears most often. Soon he learns to speak simple words, beginning with the concepts most important to him: “Mommy.” “Daddy.” “Eat.” As his mind develops, his vocabulary expands; and his understanding of the world around him grows.

Every Christian goes through a similar stage of spiritual infancy. Like a newborn child, he begins his new life able to comprehend only the most basic concepts of his new faith: “God is love.” “Jesus is Lord.” “Do for others what you would have them do for you.” Beyond that, his thoughts and judgments continue to be dictated by the carnal mind. This is a problem that Paul encountered when he tried to instruct the young church at Corinth.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, *even* as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to *bear it*, neither yet now are ye able. (1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

Just as the nutritional needs of a human baby are completely satisfied by his mother's milk, a "babe in Christ" can subsist entirely on the "sincere milk of the word."

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby .... (1 Peter 2:2)

As a baby grows, so does his need for more complex foods. For a Christian to mature spiritually, he too will require more than the "milk" of the Bible.

Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? *them that are* weaned from the milk, *and* drawn from the breasts. (Isaiah 28:9)

A Christian needs a regular diet of the "strong meat" of the Word. Without it, he will remain a child spiritually, "unskilful in the word of righteousness." This condition is especially shameful when it is discovered in those who have had adequate time to mature.

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:12-14)

At birth, a baby's legs are quite useless. But "by reason of use" his legs grow stronger and stronger. With time he learns to stand, to walk, and then to run. The same is true in the Spirit. As we grow up in Christ, we learn to "stand fast in the faith" (1 Cor. 16:13), to "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25), and to "run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1). Physically and spiritually, there are stages of growth, each step achieved through "reason of use" or "exercise."

Hebrews 5:14 equates spiritual maturity or "full age" with "those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." In this context, to have your "senses exercised" is to be "spiritually minded" (Rom. 8:6). "Refuse profane and old wives' fables," says 1 Timothy 4:7, "and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." Such exercise requires a steady diet of the "meat" of the Word

coupled with its appropriate application, lest you be “hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

In his epistle to the Galatians Paul did not try to hide his disappointment in learning that the church at Galatia had fallen into decline. Their condition was particularly upsetting to him because these Christians had once flourished. “Ye did run well,” he bemoaned, “who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Gal. 5:7). It was as though they had gone back in time, once again in need of a nursemaid. “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you” (Gal. 4:19).

Without exercise there is atrophy. Instead of growth there is regression. This is how it was in the days of Jeremiah, when Judah “hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward” (Jer. 7:24). The new birth is only the beginning of your spiritual journey. In order to grow you must exercise yourself unto godliness “until Christ be formed in you.” This, in essence, is the purpose of the spiritual gifts.

### ALL THINGS ARE BECOME NEW

An amazing thing happened the moment you were born again. The instant of your new life was also the instant of your death. When you believed in Jesus, you became one with all that he did on your behalf. In the eyes of God, when Jesus took your place on the cross to die for your sins, you died with him. For three days and three nights, you were buried with him behind the stony door of his sepulchre. When he was raised from the dead, you were raised with him.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his resurrection ....* (Romans 6:4–5)

This spiritual reality is portrayed in the Christian rite of water baptism. The participant is lowered into a watery grave, “planted in the likeness of his death.” Then, in the twinkling of an eye, he is raised “in the likeness of his resurrection” to walk in newness of life.

It is for a good reason that the public profession of faith is an integral part of a water baptism ceremony. Though it is freely received, we enter our new life under certain obligations. We are “debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh” (Rom. 8:12), but to the Spirit. We

are constrained to use the life we have received to serve the one who made it possible.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.  
(2 Corinthians 5:14–15)

We are obligated to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18), and to learn to walk according to the precepts of our new faith.

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.  
(Colossians 2:6–7)

“If any man be in Christ,” begins 2 Corinthians 5:17, “he is a new creature.” This “new creature” is “the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). It is also called the “inner man” (Eph. 3:16), the “inward man” (Rom. 7:22), the “hidden man of the heart” (1 Pet. 3:4), and the “divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). The new man is “the Spirit of God [that] dwelleth in you” (1 Cor. 3:16), the “Spirit of Christ” in a man (Rom. 8:9), and “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

2 Corinthians 5:17 concludes, “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” “Old things” are things of the “old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22). The “old man” is the carnal nature of the flesh. It is the “outward man” (2 Cor. 4:16), that which puts men at enmity with God, making them “by nature the children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3). It is the “old man” who is crucified with Christ.

Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. (Romans 6:6)

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. (Galatians 5:24)

Sin’s power to reign over you has been broken, but it will influence you in all that you allow. Though the old man is dead, it must be

*reckoned* dead.

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
(Romans 6:11)

The “old man with his deeds” must be forsaken. But we will never put off the flesh by the works of the flesh. The only way to put off the old man is to put on the new.

That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts .... And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. (Ephesians 4:22, 24)

Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new *man*, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him ....  
(Colossians 3:9–10)

David prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.” Here is God’s answer to David, and to believers everywhere: By the miracle of transformation, the carnal heart is replaced with a “clean heart” and a “right spirit.” Old things pass away and all things become new. This occurs as the “outward man” perishes and “the inward man” is renewed.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day.  
(2 Corinthians 4:16)

Picture a man coming out of a cold shadow to bask in the sun. The warmth of the sun drives the shivers from his body. The man himself did not cause this change. He only *presented himself* to be changed. Even so, we are changed – transformed by renewal – as we present ourselves unto God to be made holy and acceptable by him.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:1–2)

This transformation does not come “by works of righteousness which we have done,” but “by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). As the prophet Isaiah testified, “But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isa. 64:8).

The new man is “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10). We are renewed as the light of God shines in our hearts in the face of Jesus Christ.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are changed into his image.

But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

It is the *spiritual* mind that is renewed, not the carnal. “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind,” says Ephesians 4:23.

Putting off cold and putting on warmth occur simultaneously. You cannot do one without the other. The only way to put off the old man is to put on the new. When it comes to walking in the flesh and walking in the Spirit, “no man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other” (Matt. 6:24).

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. (John 12:25)

The man who tries to cross the street without leaving his house will do neither. Old things will pass away only if you leave them behind.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13–14)

You cannot follow the Lord while you are looking back.

And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Luke 9:61–62)

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, the Lord commanded that the man be loosed of his graveclothes.

And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. (John 11:43–44)

## TRANSFORMED

Those clothes were not fitting for someone raised from the dead. The stench of death still clung to the fabric. Just the same, it is not appropriate for a Christian to walk around in the outfitting of the damned. Now it is high time to put off the old man and put on the new!





## 12.

### THE WHOLE ARMOUR OF GOD

The glorious transformation of the old man into the new is represented in various ways in the Scriptures. Each illustration enhances the other without contradiction, adding layer upon layer to our understanding, precept upon precept, and line upon line.

To say, “put on the new man” and “put off the old man” (Col. 3:9–10) is also to say, “walk in the Spirit” and “not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

*This* I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. (Galatians 5:16)

To say, “walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” is also to say, “through the Spirit” you “do mortify the deeds of the body.”

For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. (Romans 8:13)

To say, “through the Spirit” you “do mortify the deeds of the body” is also to say, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh.”

But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to *fulfil* the lusts *thereof*. (Romans 13:14)

To say, “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for

the flesh” is also to say, “put on the armour of light” and “cast off the works of darkness.”

The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. (Romans 13:12)

Like voices in a choir, these verses harmonize one with another to proclaim a unified truth. We conquer the flesh as we walk in the Spirit. We walk in the Spirit as we put on the new man. We put on the new man as we put on the Lord Jesus Christ. We put on the Lord Jesus Christ as we put on the armour of light. This is why it is so important that a Christian learn to “put on the whole armour of God” (Eph. 6:11).

The analogy of “the armour of God” adds a different perspective to the other biblical illustrations of our Christian transformation. Armor is the protective outfitting of soldiers. It has no function except in times of war. This is a sobering reminder that the conflict between the inner man and the flesh is not the only battle we face.

This spiritual provision is called “the armour of light” in Romans 13:12, “the armour of righteousness” in 2 Corinthians 6:7, and “the whole armour of God” in Ephesians 6:11. There are six pieces of equipment listed in Ephesians: a girdle for the loins, a breastplate, shoes for the feet, a shield, a helmet, and a sword.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God ... (Ephesians 6:14–17)

As we consider each piece of the holy armor, let us also consider its counterpart, the carnal nature that must be put off. These are the “strongholds” that must be cast down with the weapons of our warfare.

### YOUR LOINS GIRT ABOUT WITH TRUTH

It is appropriate that putting on the armor of God begins with “having your loins girt about.” The first article of clothing ever worn was a covering for the loins, the aprons made by Adam and Eve. In the simplest of terms, wearing a loincloth is the difference between being clothed (howbeit scantily) and being naked. Even among primitive cultures, it is rare to find a society in which men and women do not at least wear a breechcloth.

To be “girt about your loins” is to wear a “girdle” around your mid-section. Biblically, a girdle was a belt or sash wrapped around the waist over loose fitting robes, usually an inner tunic and an outer tunic. These wraps could be functional, decorative or both. The uniform of the high priest of Israel included “the curious girdle of the ephod” (Exod. 28:8). Elijah and John the Baptist both wore girdles made of leather (2 Kings 1:8, Matt. 3:4). Fighting men attached their swords to a girdle or belt tied around their waist.

... And Joab’s garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle *with* a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof ... (2 Samuel 20:8b)

In a practical sense the girdle was worn to hold the robes in place much like a belt is worn to secure trousers. In order to be ready for action, a man needed to be girt about the loins.

And thus shall ye eat it; *with* your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it *is* the LORD’S passover. (Exodus 12:11)

To have your loins girded means to be in a state of readiness. It is no coincidence that the call to put on the armor of God in Romans and 1 Thessalonians is immediately preceded by a call to spiritual preparedness.

And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed. (Romans 13:11)

Therefore let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober. (1 Thessalonians 5:6)

To gird is to strengthen by support. In building construction, a *girder* is a support beam used to stabilize two crossbeams. In healthcare, back braces or *girdles* fortify the muscles of the loins in order to prevent or relieve injury. Similarly, a *truss* is both an architectural support and an undergarment worn to relieve a ruptured abdomen. When the loins are weak, a girdle adds strength.

And I will clothe him with thy robe, and strengthen him with thy girdle ... (Isaiah 22:21a)

The loins are the “core” of the human body. Here is the center of gravity, and the seat of physical strength and virility. Here is where locomotion commences. The “loins of your mind” refers to the core or center of your mind. A centered mind is balanced and stable. An ungirded mind is unbalanced and unstable. Such a man is “like a

wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (James 1:6), and “unstable in all his ways” (v. 8).

Joel 3:10 says, “Let the weak say, I am strong.” Though you are weak in the flesh, you will be strong in the Lord when you wear the armor of God. Therefore, you must “gird up the loins of your mind” (1 Pet. 1:13). More specifically, the loins of our mind must be “girt about with truth” (Eph. 6:14).

Psalm 107:27 well describes people with ungirded minds: “They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits’ end.” When a man is girded with truth, he will not stagger. Abraham was girt about with truth. He “staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom. 4:20). His mind was girt; he was “fully persuaded that, what [God] had promised, he was able also to perform” (v. 21).

One man “walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart” (Ps. 15:2). The other “walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:14). What accounts for the difference? Only one of these men has girded his loins with truth.

The Lord God has girded himself with strength.

The LORD reigneth, he is clothed with majesty; the LORD is clothed with strength, *wherewith* he hath girded himself: the world also is stablished, that it cannot be moved. (Psalm 93:1)

God wants his people to cleave to him as “the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man” (Jer. 13:11). We are girded in truth when we gird ourselves to the “LORD God of truth” (Ps. 31:5) and “the LORD my strength.”

The LORD God *is* my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds’ feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. (Habakkuk 3:19)

“Gird up now thy loins like a man,” said God to Job (Job 38:3). “Gird up thy loins, and arise,” he said to Jeremiah (Jer. 1:17). Jesus said, “Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning” (Luke 12:35). Put off the old man with his lethargy and weakness, and be “strengthened with might by his spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16). Gird yourself to the Lord of truth. Find your strength in him.

## THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

It is the nature of carnal man to excuse himself of all guilt, regardless of his transgressions against God and his neighbour. “All the

ways of a man are clean in his own eyes,” says Proverbs 16:2. Even the “way of a fool is right in his own eyes” (Prov. 12:15). The carnal man hardens his heart against the judgment of God with the breastplate of self-righteousness, by far the most formidable piece of the old man’s carnal armor. In this light, it is interesting that the high priest of Israel wore upon his heart “the breastplate of judgment.”

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

God’s judgment of man is quite different from man’s opinion of himself. “There is none righteous, no, not one,” says Romans 3:10. “All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags,” says Isaiah 64:6. To put on the new man is to cast off the filthy rags of self-righteousness, and stand in “the righteousness which is of God by faith.”

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith .... (Philippians 3:9)

The Roman breastplate was a piece of molded body armor, designed to protect the vital organs that are naturally encased by the ribcage. The ribcage was sufficient protection in times of peace, but its weaknesses were exposed in the test of battle. Similarly, the works of man seemed quite sufficient until man came face to face with the judgment of God. Man was weighed in the balances and found wanting. But God himself provided what man could not. By the gift of righteousness, God “justifieth the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5). When we put on the breastplate of righteousness, we are equipped to stand before God without the temptation of self-justification. We will seek his glory, and not our own.

With the breastplate, we are able to resist the accusations of the devil, the “enemy of all righteousness” (Acts 13:10), and “accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10). In this way, the breastplate of righteousness protects us like the coat of mail called the “habergeon” that was worn by Hebrew soldiers.

And Uzziah prepared for them throughout all the host shields, and spears, and helmets, and habergeons, and bows, and slings to cast stones. (2 Chronicles 26:14)

Though it is freely given, the righteousness of God never becomes *our* righteousness. We are “made the righteousness of God in

him” (2 Cor. 5:21) on account of his righteousness, and not our own. To wear the breastplate of righteousness is to stand in “the Lord our righteousness.”

In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Jeremiah 23:6)

To put on the Lord Jesus Christ is to wear the breastplate of *his* righteousness.

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:30–31)

When we wear the breastplate of righteousness, we will also be “clothed with humility” (1 Pet. 5:5). Consider Daniel’s wise prayer:

O my God, incline thine ear, and hear ... for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies. (Daniel 9:18)

Only a fool would try to use the gift of righteousness to leverage God into compliance with his demands. Daniel did not trust in his own righteousness, but in God’s great mercy. It is the folly of man that he can become self-righteous about being made righteous by God! The moment we consider this righteousness our own, we throw away the righteousness of Christ and put on self-righteousness again. How mindful we must be to ensure that we do not reclaim the wretched breastplate of self-righteousness!

When I shall say to the righteous, *that* he shall surely live; if he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it. (Ezekiel 33:13)

We must continually put off the old man and “put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:24). This is the way to be renewed in his image, and freed from the sinful, self-serving ways of the flesh. Put off the old man with his self-righteous pride. Put on the Lord our Righteousness and wear “the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ” (Rom. 3:22).

#### FEETSHOD WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE

James 3:18 says, “The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.” We sow peace as we proclaim the gospel of peace. As it is written in Romans 10:5, “How beautiful are the feet of

them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

No part of the body comes into contact with the environment more than the feet. That is why footwear is such an essential part of our wardrobe. Ever since the fall of man, he has needed footwear to protect his feet from such hazards as freezing snow, burning sand, jagged rocks, poisonous plants, and parasites.

It is true that in many equatorial societies there are people, especially children, who go shoeless. However, such feet could hardly be called “beautiful.” They bear the scars of their service. In order for feet to stay beautiful, they must be shod.

How beautiful are thy feet with shoes, O prince’s daughter! the joints of thy thighs *are* like jewels, the work of the hands of a cunning workman. (Song of Solomon 7:1)

To *keep* is to preserve in good condition. When our feet are shod, they are “kept by God.”

He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail. (1 Samuel 2:9)

Footwear serves as a buffer between man and the harshness of his environment. The peace of God buffers our hearts and minds from the troubles of this world.

Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he trusteth in thee. (Isaiah 26:3)

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

The Lord is able to keep us by his peace because he is the Lord our Peace, “Jehovah-shalom” (Judg. 6:24). By his peace, the God of peace sanctifies and preserves his people.

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thessalonians 5:23)

When we likewise sanctify God in our hearts, we are prepared to present the gospel of peace.

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear .... (1 Peter 3:15)

The way to “sanctify the Lord God in your heart” is to meditate in his precepts. “I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways,” says Psalm 119:15. We meditate on what *the Lord* has

said, not on what we should say. “Take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak,” said Jesus in Mark 13:11, “neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.”

Settle *it* therefore in your hearts, not to meditate before what ye shall answer: For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. (Luke 21:14–15)

When we settle in our hearts that the Lord alone can provide the words and the wisdom we need to give an answer to every man, then we can say like Paul, “As much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel” (Rom. 1:15). We have shod our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace.

“Withhold thy foot from being unshod,” says Jeremiah 2:25. When our feet are shod, we will not slip. God enlarges your feet under you and establishes your goings.

Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip. (Psalm 18:36)

He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, *and* established my goings. (Psalm 40:2)

We must put off the old man with his fears and uncertainties, and put on the Lord Jesus Christ. “He is our peace,” says Ephesians 2:14, and through him we are made “perfect in every good work to do his will” (Heb. 13:21).

## THE SHIELD OF FAITH

The next piece of armor is a shield against the devil’s attacks. The “shield of faith” protects the children of God from the “fiery darts” hurled by the “rulers of the darkness of this world,” the agents of “spiritual wickedness in high places.”

A dart is a projectile weapon similar to a small spear. It is launched by hand and not by a bow. A dart has a shorter range than an arrow or a javelin. It can also be used as a hand weapon, although this is not its primary function.

Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he *was* yet alive in the midst of the oak. (2 Samuel 18:14)

A fiery dart is designed so that, once the missile reaches its tar-



get, the fire it carries causes more damage than the dart itself. In that way, a dart is like a firebrand.

As a mad *man* who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death, So *is* the man *that* deceiveth his neighbour, and saith, Am not I in sport? (Proverbs 26:18–19)

As the dart is a vehicle for the fire, so it is that words are used by the devil to torment our soul.

The words of a talebearer *are* as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly. (v. 22)

The fiery darts of the wicked are their evil and bitter words.

My soul *is* among lions: *and* I lie *even among* them that are set on fire, *even* the sons of men, whose teeth *are* spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword. (Psalm 57:4)

Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: Who whet their tongue like a sword, *and* bend *their bows to shoot* their arrows, *even* bitter words: That they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. (Psalm 64:2–4)

But, as God told Ezekiel, we should not be afraid of the vicious words of the wicked.

And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns *be* with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they *be* a rebellious house. (Ezekiel 2:6)

The significance of these verses becomes clearer as we remember that we “wrestle not against flesh and blood.” It is only by the shield of faith that we stand with those who have “quenched the violence of fires” (Heb. 11:34). Remember the example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, “upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them” (Dan. 3:27). As fire consumes the thorns, even so the shield of faith extinguishes the fiery darts of the wicked.

They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. (Psalm 118:12)

Our faith does not protect us. God protects us. He is our shield. Our faith is in him.

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

But thou, O LORD, *art* a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. (Psalm 3:3)

Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. (Psalm 84:9)

As our shield, he encompasses us with his anointing, blessing, and favor.

For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as *with* a shield. (Psalm 5:12)

We put our trust in him, because he is strong and we know he will help us.

Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he *is* their help and their shield. (Psalm 115:11)

*Because of* his strength will I wait upon thee: for God *is* my defence. (Psalm 59:9)

The old man puts his trust in carnal strength and wisdom. This is his folly and his curse. As we read in Psalm 118:8–9, “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.” The Lord is “a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him” (Nah. 1:7). This gives us the boldness to say, “The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6). Our shield of faith is our trust in God. He is our defense against trouble.

Having no shield, the carnal man lashes out with the same evil that was directed at him. In so doing, he becomes one more link in a long wicked chain. “Be not overcome of evil,” says Romans 12:21, “but overcome evil with good.” Be the one to *break* the chain! Put off the old man with his schemes of vengeance. Put on the new man and stand under the wings of the Lord your shield.

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth *shall be thy* shield and buckler. (Psalm 91:4)

## THE HELMET OF SALVATION

As the Lord’s “apostle to the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:13), Paul addressed much of his message to those who came to Christ as strangers to the covenants of promise.

Wherefore remember, that ye *being* in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye

were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world .... (Ephesians 2:11–12)

By the mouth of Isaiah, God promised, “I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). Simeon recalled this promise when he blessed the infant Jesus at the temple:

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. (Luke 2:30–32)

Nevertheless, many years passed before the call to salvation was specifically heralded to the Gentiles. Even in the days of his ministry on earth, Jesus had said, “Salvation is of the Jews” (John 3:22). The fulfilling of Isaiah’s prophecy began in earnest with Paul.

For so hath the Lord commanded us, *saying*, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. (Acts 13:47)

The Gentiles had neither God nor hope because they had no Savior. There is no true hope without salvation, and there is no salvation without the Lord.

*I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour.*  
(Isaiah 43:11)

Having come to Christ, our salvation is a past, present, and future reality. The God who “delivered us from so great a death,” even now “doth deliver” us, and “will yet deliver us” (2 Cor. 1:10). Though we are saved, the inner man groans for the day when that salvation is fully realized. We “which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). The “firstfruits of the Spirit” is “Christ in you.” The “redemption of our body” is our “hope of glory.”

To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory .... (Colossians 1:27)

To put on the whole armor of God, we must take the “helmet of salvation” (Eph. 6:17). This is the same “helmet of salvation” worn by our Deliverer (Isa 59:17). As 1 Thessalonians 5:8 clarifies, it is the helmet of “the hope of salvation.” To wear this helmet is to be strong in him that is the God of salvation, and the God of hope.

*He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues from death.* (Psalm 68:20)

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost. (Romans 15:13)

With hope, we will abound. Without it, there is only despair.

What *is* my strength, that I should hope? and what *is* mine end, that I should prolong my life? (Job 6:11)

Despair is a head injury. The helmet of salvation is our answer for those times we are downcast.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and *why* art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him *for* the help of his countenance. (Psalm 42:5)

“My soul fainteth for thy salvation: but I hope in thy word,” says Psalm 119:81. When we put on the new man, the God of hope renews and sustains us.

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. (2 Corinthians 4:16)

The hope of salvation is our strong and everlasting consolation, and the anchor of our soul.

Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation and good hope through grace ... (2 Thessalonians 2:16)

That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which *hope* we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil .... (Hebrews 6:18–19)

When we wear the helmet of salvation, God himself covers our head in the day of battle.

O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle. (Psalm 140:7)

Put off the old man with his despair. Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, the hope of glory.

## THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

The last piece of armor listed in Ephesians is also the only weapon, the “sword of the Spirit which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17). There is no greater symbol of the glory and majesty of the Lord God than the sword by which he executes his righteous judgment.

Gird thy sword upon *thy* thigh, O *most* mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. (Psalm 45:3)

The Lord himself is the sword of our excellency.

Happy *art* thou, O Israel: who *is* like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who *is* the sword of thy excellency! ... (Deuteronomy 33:29a)

The sword of the Spirit proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength. (Revelation 1:16)

From the mouth of the Lord comes wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth *cometh* knowledge and understanding. (Proverbs 2:6)

When we speak the Word of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, the twoedged sword is in our mouth as well.

And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me .... (Isaiah 49:2)

By its very design, a twoedged sword is made to pierce and divide.

For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

It is by the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, that the Lord examines our hearts.

Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart. (Psalm 26:2)

It is by his Word that we must examine ourselves.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates? (2 Corinthians 13:5)

Until we are willing to hold ourselves to the same high standards of Christian conduct that we expect of others, we will not bear the sword of God honestly.

Either how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. (Luke 6:42)

You must cast down imaginations and bring “into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5) in your *own* life first, with “a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled” (v. 6). You must be afraid of the sword of God, even as you walk in the fear of the Lord.

Be ye afraid of the sword: for wrath *bringeth* the punishments of the sword, that ye may know *there is* a judgment. (Job 19:29)

You must handle the sword of the Spirit honestly with yourself before you can be trusted to handle it before others. God continually tries the hearts of those who bear his sword.

But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. (1 Thessalonians 2:4)

It is highly needful that we learn to bear his sword well.

For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to *execute* wrath upon him that doeth evil. (Romans 13:4)

Lest we bear the sword in vain, we must speak the truth “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess. 2:13).

Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt. 10:34). “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth?” he asked, “I tell you, Nay; but rather division” (Luke 12:51). With his sword he divides truth from error, and the sheep from the goats.

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth *his* sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. (Matthew 25:31–33)

Just as God himself is the sword of our excellency, the sword we wield must be his sword, and not our own. Paul ministered by the excellency of the sword of the Spirit, not by excellency of speech.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1)

1 Corinthians 3:19 says, “The wisdom of this world is foolishness

with God.” Paul knew that unproven notions and vain insights were of no use in the spiritual fight. A sword made of plastic can look authentic, but in battle, it is worthless. So it is with the wisdom of man. We need a proven sword, the twoedged sword of the Spirit.

*Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand ... (Psalm 149:6)*

1 Corinthians 1:24 calls Christ “the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” He is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. Put off carnal wisdom, which is foolishness. Put on Christ, the wisdom and power of God.

### THE DOUBLE ENMITY RESOLVED

To put on the armor of God is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ. Each individual piece represents a truth concerning our union with him. Jesus is our truth, our righteousness, our peace, our faith, and our salvation. He is our defense against all attacks, and our strength in the face of all opposition.

You cannot put off the old man without putting on the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, put off weakness, and gird your loins with Christ your strength. Put off self-righteousness, and put on the breastplate of Christ your righteousness. Put off your burdens and cares, and let your feet be shod with Christ your peace. Put off vengeance, and take up Christ your shield. Put off despair, and put on the helmet of Christ your hope. Put off carnal wisdom, and take up the sword of Christ, the wisdom of God.

All that we are, and all that we can do, is because of him. Without Jesus, we can do nothing. For this reason, the final act in putting on the armor of God is to pray.

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints ... (Ephesians 6:18)*

When we wear the whole armor of God, we accomplish two marvelous things. By putting on the Lord Jesus Christ, we make no provision for the flesh. Our interior battle against the enmity of the carnal mind is won. Then, by standing in that same armor, we are equipped to stand against the powers of darkness in this world, the enmity of Genesis 3:15. Standing in the armor of God, we stand at the threshold of all the blessings that God desires for his children.





## 13.

### BETWEEN THE RED SEA AND THE RIVER JORDAN

The philosopher George Santayana famously wrote, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” I am confident that Paul would not mind my use of his words of endorsement, “This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance” (1 Tim. 4:9). It is far less painful to learn from other people’s mistakes than it is to learn from your own. The Scriptures exhort all God-fearing people to learn from the mistakes made by the Israelites in the days of Moses, to the end that we do not make the same mistakes ourselves.

Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. (Hebrews 3:8–9)

We have good reason to heed this warning.

For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end .... (v. 14)

Some of God’s promises to mankind are unconditional. For example, after the Great Flood, God pledged, “I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake ... neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Gen. 8:21–22).

And I will remember my covenant, which *is* between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh. And the bow shall be in the cloud; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* upon the earth. (Genesis 9:15–16)

Nothing man does for good or bad will alter God's commitment to this promise. This covenant is unconditional. But because God gave his creature free will, most of his promises to mankind are conditional. There are things we must do in order to receive the promise. In Hebrews 3:14, the little word "if" casts a long shadow of significance. We will be "partakers of Christ" only if we "hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end." We will enjoy the fruits of Christianity only so long as we remain stedfast in our faith.

While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. (Hebrews 3:15)

The vast majority of Israelites who left Egypt with Moses were not "stedfast unto the end." Though they clearly heard his voice, they hardened their hearts against the Lord and therefore did not partake in his promises. The same thing could happen to any one of us.

For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? *was it* not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? (vv. 16–18)

Out of "all that came out of Egypt by Moses," God was only grieved "with them that had sinned." Still, there was little reason for him to be pleased. Of the "about six hundred thousand on foot that were men" that left Egypt with Moses (Exod. 12:37), only *two* settled in the Promised Land. Two out of six hundred thousand is about 0.033%! That means 99.967% of the men failed to complete the Exodus journey all the way to its end.

So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. (Hebrews 3:19)

The question remains, what did they not believe? This is something we must discover if we desire to be "stedfast unto the end."

## FROM EGYPT TO THE PROMISED LAND

The entire journey of the Israelites out of Egypt to the Land of Canaan divides into three sections: From Egypt to the Red Sea, from the

Red Sea to the Jordan River, and from the Jordan River to the Land of Canaan. Advancing from one stage to the next necessitated crossing a body of water, first the Red Sea, and then the Jordan River.

The journey from Egypt to the Red Sea (detailed in Exodus chapters three through fifteen) is summarized in three verses from the book of Hebrews.

By faith [Moses] forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry *land*: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned. (Hebrews 11:27–29)

Having crossed the Red Sea, the Israelites began the second part of their journey, from the Red Sea to the Jordan. About six weeks after leaving Egypt, the Israelites entered the wilderness of Sin.

And they took their journey from Elim, and all the congregation of the children of Israel came unto the wilderness of Sin, which *is* between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after their departing out of the land of Egypt. (Exodus 16:1)

Here, the Lord began to provide them with manna, the “bread from heaven.”

Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no. (v. 4)

Half a month later, they reached the wilderness of Sinai, where they set up camp before the mount of God.

In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they *into* the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come *to* the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. (Exodus 19:1–2)

The Israelites camped in the wilderness of Sinai for almost a full year. Great and marvelous events occurred during this time, as again and again Moses communed with God upon Mount Sinai. Moses received the Ten Commandments, and the Law of God. He received wonderfully specific guidance concerning the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle of God, and the establishment of the priesthood. It then became his responsibility to oversee the completion of these projects. Finally, “in the first month in the second year, on the first day

of the month,” the Tabernacle was erected.

Thus did Moses: according to all that the LORD commanded him, so did he. And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first *day* of the month, *that* the tabernacle was reared up. (Exodus 40:16–17)

One month later, God commanded Moses to take a census of the children of Israel.

And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first *day* of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of *their* names, every male by their polls; From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies. (Numbers 1:1–3)

Furthermore, the Lord commanded Moses to set the camp in order according to tribe.

And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses: so they pitched by their standards, and so they set forward, every one after their families, according to the house of their fathers. (Numbers 2:34)

Nineteen days later, the work was complete. The Israelites broke down the camp and resumed their journey to the Promised Land. Their first stop was in the wilderness of Paran.

And it came to pass on the twentieth *day* of the second month, in the second year, that the cloud was taken up from off the tabernacle of the testimony. And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran. (Numbers 10:11–12)

It was in Paran that Moses commissioned twelve men – one man from each tribe – to scout out the land across the Jordan.

And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men *were* heads of the children of Israel. (Numbers 13:3)

And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this *way* southward, and go up into the mountain: And see the land, what it *is*; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they *be* strong or weak, few or many; And what the land *is* that they dwell in, whether it *be* good or bad; and what cities *they be* that they dwell in, whether in

tents, or in strong holds; And what the land *is*, whether it *be* fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land ... (vv. 17–20a)

For forty days, the twelve spies inspected the land of Canaan. They returned to Paran carrying “a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff” (v. 23). All twelve men testified of the land’s great bounty. “We came unto the land whither thou sentest us,” they told Moses, “and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it” (v. 27). But this was not all they discovered in the land of Canaan.

Nevertheless the people *be* strong that dwell in the land, and the cities *are* walled, *and* very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. (vv. 28–29)

Evidently, most of the Israelites expected to harvest the fruit of the Promised Land as easily as they gathered the daily manna. After they discovered that armies of giants dwelled in the land, their courage disappeared. One of the spies, a man named Caleb, “stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it” (v. 30). The majority of his fellow spies did not share his enthusiasm. “We be not able to go up against the people,” they said, “for they are stronger than we” (v. 31). Fear spread through the camp like a grassfire.

And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? (Numbers 14:2–3)

Another spy, Joshua by name, added his voice to Caleb’s exhortation. “If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land” (vv. 8–9). But the fearful words of the ten faithless men convinced the congregation to utterly reject the good words of Joshua and Caleb.

But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. (v. 10)

“How long will this people provoke me?” said the Lord to Moses, “and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them?” (v. 11). The Lord told Moses that he intended to “smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they” (v. 12). But Moses pleaded on behalf of his congregation until God rescinded, and pardoned the Israelites. They would not all die that day, but neither would their sin be forgotten.

Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it .... (vv. 22–23)

How foolish we are to forget that God hears every idle word we speak. “Would God we had died in this wilderness!” moaned the unbelieving Israelites. They were about to get their wish. “As truly as I live,” said the Lord, “as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me” (vv. 28–29).

The only ones to enter the Promised Land would be Joshua, Caleb, and “your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, and your children, which in that day had no knowledge between good and evil” (Deut. 1:39). The remainder would wander in the wilderness for forty years, one year for each day the spies searched the land of Canaan, until they had indeed died in the wilderness.

After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, *even* forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, *even* forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. (Numbers 14:34)

The congregation ended that day with ten fewer men. “Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD” (v. 37). As for the remainder, their days of wandering had begun.

For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, till all the people *that were* men of war, which came out of Egypt, were consumed, because they obeyed not the voice of the LORD: unto whom the LORD swore that he would not shew them the land, which the LORD swore unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey. (Joshua 5:6)

Forty-two years after the exodus from Egypt, Joshua led a new generation of Israelites into the Promised Land. Just as the Red Sea had done previously, the waters of the Jordan miraculously opened, and the people crossed over on dry ground.

And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all the people were passed clean over Jordan. (Joshua 3:17)

What should have taken two years instead took forty-two. Nevertheless, just as God had promised his servant Moses, the Children of Israel crossed into the land of milk and honey to begin the third part of their journey – a new life in the Promised Land.

### THE ALLEGORY

The three parts of the journey – from Egypt to the Red Sea, from the Red Sea to the Jordan River, and from the Jordan River to the Land of Canaan – are an allegory of the three stages of a Christian's pilgrimage, given to us as an example and admonition.

Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:11–12)

The first stage of the journey is our exodus from the kingdom of darkness. Colossians 1:13 says that God “hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son.” Just as Moses stood before the Pharaoh and cried, “Let my people go, that they may serve me” (Exod. 8:1), even so Jesus Christ defied the pharaoh of hell to free us from sin, so we could become the “servants of righteousness” (Rom. 6:18). Just as Moses ministered the Passover Lamb when he told the elders of Israel, “Draw out and take you a lamb according to your families, and kill the passover” (Exod. 12:21), even so “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7). Just as the Israelites “were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” when they crossed the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2), even so, as “many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:3). Our “Red Sea” runs red with the blood of Jesus Christ, “the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb. 13:20).

On the far side of our Red Sea, we begin a new life in Christ. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death,” says Ro-

mans 6:4, “that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” Here we begin the second stage of our pilgrimage, as we learn to put off the old man and put on the new, and to walk by faith and not by sight.

The land of Canaan was a land not only “flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 3:8), but also with “fierce giants” (Num. 13:33). The Israelites could not occupy the land for themselves until the pagans were driven out. Even then, they had to diligently guard against their enemies’ efforts to reclaim the land that was once theirs.

The Promised Land was not a picture of the eternal paradise destined for the children of God. There will be no enemies to conquer in our final paradise. The Land of Canaan symbolizes the good life that is possible here and now, even in “this present evil world” (Gal. 1:4), when Christians cast out the works of darkness from their lives and walk in newness of life. We cross over our “Jordan River” when we have faith to “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1).

The Promised Land represents a Christian partaking in the promises of God. In the third stage of his pilgrimage, he is no longer trying to be a “good Christian” by his own merit or works. He is not relying on his own strength to combat his troubles or his enemies. His trust is in God.

For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his. (Hebrews 4:10)

For a truth, God continued to do many wonderful things for the Children of Israel as they wandered the desert land between the Red Sea and the Jordan River. Deuteronomy 32:10 says, “He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.” Still, that “waste howling wilderness” was no substitute for the beautiful land that God had intended for them.

The stage of the journey that beset the Israelites is the same stage of the spiritual journey that besets many Christians today. The waste howling wilderness is carnal Christianity. We will wander in that wilderness as long as we try to attain the promises of God by our own means.

The Israelites had witnessed the power of God unleashed on their behalf. The twelve spies gave unanimous testimony of the bounty awaiting them in the land of Canaan. The congregation even sampled some of the fruits themselves. Still, the Israelites bowed to fear rather



than to God. “They could not enter in because of unbelief,” says Hebrews 3:19. Despite all that they had experienced, they still trusted in their own strength more than they trusted God. They failed, as Psalm 78:22 says, “because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation.”

Joshua and Caleb did not deny the fearsome power of the pagan armies. They knew that man for man the Israelites were no match for the armies of Canaan. They were not suggesting that the Israelites enter into battle by their own strength! “The Lord is with us!” they said.

Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they *are* bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD *is* with us: fear them not.  
(Numbers 14:9)

As Christians, we will *never* cross the Jordan River by our own strength! Like Joshua and Caleb, we must “labour to enter into that rest,” a rest that comes only to those who fully trust in God.

Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief. (Hebrews 4:11)

Tragically, most Christians will live out their lives between the Red Sea and the Jordan River. They are saved, having escaped the kingdom of darkness and crossed the spiritual Red Sea. But they are presently wandering in that “waste howling wilderness” that is carnal Christianity.

A Christian emerges from his baptism full of joy and expectation of a new life. But he does not pass directly into the Promised Land; he must first face his own temptation in the wilderness. He will be tested, not by God but by life itself, to see where he puts his trust, and what he considers his wellspring of strength. So long as he depends upon himself, he will continue to wander. The longer he remains in the wilderness, the more the “land of milk and honey” will seem like a fantasy rather than a reality. The things he left behind “in Egypt” will be missed more and more. If he could, he might even turn back.

We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: But now our soul *is* dried away: *there is* nothing at all, beside this manna, *before* our eyes. (Numbers 11:5–6)

As the years passed in the wilderness, there were undoubtedly some Israelites who consoled themselves with the thought that the land probably was not really that good. Still, thoughts of *what could have been* mocked them for their weakness and unbelief. Truly, there

is no place on earth more desolate than the waste-howling wilderness between the Red Sea and the Jordan River!

At long last, a new generation crossed over the Jordan into the Promised Land. Only a new generation can cross the Jordan. It is the generation of new creatures in Christ, “the generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face” (Ps. 24:6). This is the generation of those who have come out of spiritual Egypt, and have cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him .... (Numbers 32:21)

That is why we need the armor of God, and the weapons of our warfare! When we put on the armor of God, we overcome the enmity of the flesh because we put off the old man and put on the new. Then, standing in the power of God, we are able to stand against the enmity of the powers of darkness. We are “able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:13). We must go *armed* over the Jordan, not with the armaments of the flesh, but of the Spirit of God. It is when we put on the armor of God and the weapons of our warfare that we stand at the water’s edge of the Jordan River, ready to pass over to the land of milk and honey, and claim what has been promised to us by God.

How do we get there? As Psalm 143:10 says, “Teach me to do thy will; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness.” We must learn from God how to be strong in him, and in the power of his might. We must learn the ways of his sufficiency, and how we can stand in the excellency of his power, and not our own.

Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*. (Isaiah 1:18–20)

Every morning, you and I wake up in the wilderness. If we are “willing and obedient,” we will cross the spiritual Jordan to eat the good of the land. But if we “refuse and rebel,” we will wander the wilderness until there our carcasses fall.

That is why we must be saved. That is why we need the armor of God, and the weapons of our warfare. That is why we have been given the gifts of the Spirit, so that we can be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. It is only then that we can be “partakers of

Christ,” and “followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb. 6:12).

### THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

In 2 Timothy 2:3, Paul exhorted Timothy that he “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” Along with the angels of heaven, we are soldiers in the army of the living God. To say the least, this gives us great advantage over our enemies. Whenever we fight on the side of the Lord, we fight on the side of superior strength. As Romans 8:31 asks, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” Even if it were only a matter of numbers, we would still have a decisive edge. One third of heaven’s angels fell with Lucifer, but two-thirds remain on the side of righteousness. The army of heaven outnumbers the army of Satan two-to-one!

Superior numbers alone, however, do not guarantee victory. Most often, superior weaponry prevails. One man skilled with a rifle will not fret over six men armed with knives. Here we see another advantage we have over our enemy. The Lord has furnished his army with armor and weapons specially suited for victory in the spiritual battle.

As we previously discovered, we must all go “armed over Jordan before the LORD.” But those armaments we bear must be the spiritual armaments provided by God, “not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds” (2 Cor. 10:4). The weapons of our warfare are the nine gifts of the Spirit, listed in 1 Corinthians 12:7–10 according to their outward manifestation.

But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another *divers* kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues .... (1 Corinthians 12:7–10)

There is a difference between the gift, the act, and the manifestation. The *gift* is the ability. The *act* is the use of the gift. The *manifestation* is the outward evidence that is produced by the use of the gift. For example, one gift is the gift of tongues. To use the gift is to speak in tongues. What you hear when someone speaks in tongues is the manifestation of tongues.

To better understand the gifts of the Spirit, it is useful to separate them into three categories. These divisions are not named in the

Bible, but they are inferred by the function and benefit of each gift. In these lessons, the nine gifts of the Spirit have been separated into three *edification* gifts, three *revelation* gifts, and three *action* gifts. The *edification* gifts are the gift of tongues, the gift of the interpretation of tongues, and the gift of prophecy. By their use Christians are built up in the inner man. The *revelation* gifts are the gift of the word of knowledge, the gift of the word of wisdom, and the gift of discerning of spirits. By their use Christians are able to receive special information from God. The *action* gifts are the gift of faith, the gift of the working of miracles, and the gifts of healing. By their use believers are able to do supernatural deeds in the name of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation they have received from God.

In the story told by Jesus, the man failed to build a tower because he was “not able.” It is by the gifts of the Spirit that Christians are *enabled* to do the work set before them.

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry ...  
(1 Timothy 1:12)

The gifts of the Spirit are supernatural abilities. 1 Peter 4:11 says, “If any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth,” that is to say, by use of the spiritual gifts. Each gift enables you to do something you otherwise could not do. God provides the ability. We must provide the willingness to obey. As Isaiah said, “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land” (Isa. 1:18). God does not *make* us do his will. He makes us *able*. He does not *make* us speak in tongues; he makes us *able* to speak in tongues. He does not *make* us prophesy; he makes us *able* to prophesy. Through these gifts, God makes us “able ministers of the new testament” (2 Cor. 3:6).

The gifts of the Spirit are distributed by God, “dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Cor. 12:11). No man can receive any thing from God that God does not want to give. On the other hand, God does not force anyone to receive something they do not want. For great things to happen, both the will of the Father and the will of his children must be aligned.

We have tried to do things in our own strength, and we have failed. Now is the time to learn to stand in the power of his might. Now is the time to learn how to fight the good fight of faith. In Christ, we are *able* to stand against the wiles of the devil, *able* to withstand in the evil day, and *able* to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. This is what we need in order to fight a good fight and run a good race. This is

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the need that God promises to supply. Let the proclamation of Psalm 144:1 be our battle cry: “Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.”



PART TWO

THE EDIFICATION GIFTS  
OF THE SPIRIT





## 14.

### *THE GIFT OF TONGUES*

### THE DAY OF PENTECOST

For centuries, God's covenants were the exclusive privilege of the Children of Israel. Gentiles were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise" (Eph. 2:12). Everything changed when Jesus died on the cross, and "abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances" (v. 15). Since that time, a countless number of Gentiles have been added to the church, "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (v. 19).

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between* us ....  
(Ephesians 2:14)

God never intended for Gentiles, once saved, to live according to Jewish laws and traditions. As Peter reasoned with the elders in Jerusalem, "Why tempt ye God to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10). Still, there is good reason for Gentiles to learn the lessons and history of the Old Testament. As Romans 15:4 says, "For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope."

## THE HEBREW FEASTS

Ever since the days of Moses, the Children of Israel celebrated their special relationship with God through feasts held three times in a year: in the spring, the summer, and the autumn.

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

Eventually, the place of the Lord's choosing was Jerusalem, the city of David and home to the temple of God. All adult males, as the heads of their households, were expected to come to Jerusalem for these events. Special allowances were made when "the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to put his name there be too far from thee" (Deut. 12:21). In that case, a private observation was permitted.

In all, the Jews held seven annual feasts. Three feasts were held in springtime, one was held during the summer harvest, and three more took place during the autumn harvest. The three springtime feasts are collectively called "the feast of unleavened bread" in Deuteronomy 16:16. This seven-day observance included the feast of Passover, the feast of Unleavened Bread, and the day of Firstfruits.

In the fourteenth *day* of the first month at even *is* the LORD's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month *is* the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread. (Leviticus 23:5-6)

Also in the day of the firstfruits, when ye bring a new meat offering unto the LORD, after your weeks *be out*, ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work .... (Numbers 28:26)

The summertime feast was called the feast of Weeks because it occurred seven weeks after the feast of Firstfruits. Later it was known as the feast of Pentecost, from the Greek word for "fifty."

And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. (Leviticus 23:15-16)

The three autumn feasts are collectively called "the feast of tabernacles" in Deuteronomy 16:13. These feasts were the feast of Trumpets, the day of Atonement, and the feast of Tabernacles, held on the first, tenth, and fifteenth day of the seventh month.

## THE DAY OF PENTECOST

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, In the seventh month, in the first *day* of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation. (Leviticus 23:24)

Also on the tenth *day* of this seventh month *there shall* be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation unto you; and ye shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the LORD. (v. 27)

Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, The fifteenth day of this seventh month *shall be* the feast of tabernacles *for* seven days unto the LORD. (v. 34)

The seven feasts of Israel had special meaning to the Israelites. Each feast commemorated past miracles and future promises given to them. But these holy days are meaningful to New Testament believers as well, whether they are Jew or Gentile, because each feast was a “shadow of things to come” (Col. 2:17). Each festival foreshadowed the deeds of the promised Messiah.

The springtime feast of Unleavened Bread reminded the Israelites of their miracle-filled exodus from Egypt.

And ye shall observe *the feast of* unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever. (Exodus 12:17)

Most importantly, the feast of Unleavened Bread foreshadowed the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. As Paul wrote, “For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7). Jesus was crucified on the day the Jews killed the Passover lamb; he was buried as they observed the feast of Unleavened Bread; and he was resurrected on the day they celebrated the feast of Firstfruits. This was not a coincidence, but rather a fulfillment of heavenly orchestration.

The feast of Pentecost memorialized the day that God gave the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai. When Moses came down from the mountain, he discovered the Israelites worshipping a golden calf. Exodus 32:28 reports that “there fell of the people that day about three thousand men.” It was the Law that made known the penalty for sin. As Paul later explained, “When the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom. 7:9).

The feast of Pentecost foreshadowed the dispensation of Grace. John 1:17 tells us, “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” On that blessed day of Pentecost, “they

that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). The precision of the Bible is wonderful. "About three thousand men" died the day the Law was given, and "about three thousand men" were saved when the day of Grace arrived.

The autumn feasts reminded the Jews of God's miraculous provision during the years that they wandered in the wilderness. For forty years, the children of Israel were fed with manna, the bread from heaven. God was faithful to them, even though they were not faithful in return.

The ultimate reality represented by the autumn feasts has not yet been fulfilled. The feast of Trumpets looks ahead to the rapture of the Church of Jesus Christ. The day of Atonement anticipates the Second Coming of Christ and Israel's full reconciliation with God, when "all Israel shall be saved" (Rom. 11:26). The feast of Tabernacles points to the millennial reign of Christ, when Israel will finally occupy all of the Promised Land.

### FULLY COME

The feast of Pentecost was an annual event. The *day* of Pentecost was a one-time occasion. All the celebrations of the past were like sections of railroad track laid end-to-end, each one helping to prepare for the day when the great train would arrive at the station.

And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. (Acts 2:1)

Almost two months had passed since Jesus had been crucified. Seven sabbaths had passed since his resurrection from the dead. For forty days, Jesus had been in communion with the apostles, appearing before them in his resurrected body, and "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). During those days, Jesus gave his disciples special instruction. "I send the promise of my Father upon you," he said, "but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). The Master and his disciples gathered together one last time on the Mount of Olives, and then they watched him ascend into heaven. Their sorrow at his departure was quickly replaced with joyful anticipation of his return.

And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall

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so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.  
(Acts 1:10–11)

During the ten days since Jesus' departure, the disciples had been "continually in the temple, praising and blessing God" (Luke 24:53). During that time, the eleven original apostles appointed Matthias to fill the void left by Judas Iscariot. It was now the fiftieth day since Jesus rose from the dead. After centuries of preparation, everything was finally in place. The day of Pentecost had fully come.

### THE DAY THE SPIRIT OF GOD DEPARTED FROM THE TEMPLE

The temple that stood in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost was not the same temple built by King Solomon almost a thousand years previously. Solomon's temple was destroyed by the armies of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 586 BC.

The overthrow of Jerusalem by the Babylonians occurred in three stages. In the first attack of 605 BC, the prophet Daniel was among the Jews carried off into Babylon. In the second attack of 597 BC, the prophet Ezekiel was among those taken away. It was in the third attack of 586 BC that Jerusalem fell, and Solomon's temple was destroyed.

In the book that bears his name, Ezekiel recalls many of the visions and dreams he saw while he was being held captive in Babylon. In a startling series of revelations, the Lord took Ezekiel on a guided tour of Jerusalem. He even took him through a hole in the wall of the temple so he could see for himself how corrupt Israel had become.

"So I went in," wrote the prophet in Ezekiel 8:10, "and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the wall round about." Then said the Lord to Ezekiel, "Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery?" (v. 12). Deeper and deeper, God brought Ezekiel through the temple, exposing more and more of the abominations therein. Finally, he brought him into the inner court of the temple, and there, "between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east" (v. 16).

These twenty-five idolatrous men, with their backsides turned toward God, show how utterly defiled the people had become. So severe was Judah's forsaking of the Lord that he had no choice but to forsake them.

Then he said unto me, Hast thou seen *this*, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose. Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them. (Ezekiel 8:17-18)

Ezekiel watched in horror as the glory of the Lord departed from the temple in Jerusalem, first “up from the cherub,” and “over the threshold of the house” (Ezek. 10:4); then “off the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubims” (v. 18). From there, it went to “the door of the east gate of the Lord’s house,” (v. 19) until finally, “the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city, and stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city” (Ezek. 11:23). From the Mount of Olives, the glory of the Lord disappeared from sight. The prophecy of Hosea well describes God’s judgment on the matter.

I will go *and* return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early. (Hosea 5:15)

Some four hundred years previously, when David was newly king, and the temple in Jerusalem was not yet even conceived by him, he brought the ark of God from Abinadab to Jerusalem. “They set the ark of God upon a new cart,” says the Bible, and a man named Uzzah “put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it” (2 Sam. 6:3, 6). So great was this transgression that “the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God” (v. 7).

Uzzah died merely for having touched the ark. How then were the Babylonians able to destroy the temple in Jerusalem? The moment the Spirit of God left the temple, the ark became nothing more than a holy relic, a piece of furniture. Jerusalem was left to die. The departure of the glory of the Lord from the House of God foreshadowed the departure of the Spirit of God from Jesus as he hung on the cross, so that he could lay down his life for our sins.

About fifty years after the fall of Jerusalem, Cyrus, the emperor of Persia, decreed that the temple should be rebuilt. Years later, this temple was enlarged and embellished by King Herod. However, there is no biblical record of God’s glory returning to reside there. The next time the Spirit of the Lord visited the temple in Jerusalem was in the person of God Incarnate, Jesus the Christ.

THE DAY THE SPIRIT OF GOD RETURNED TO THE TEMPLE

But now, Jesus had ascended up to heaven, from the very same Mount of Olives. And now, for one final time, the Spirit of God returned to the temple, as if to announce, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24).

God breathed and gave us his Word. God breathed and created his angels. He breathed and gave man life. And on the day of Pentecost, God breathed and heralded a new era for his people:

And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost .... (John 20:22)

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. (Acts 2:2-3)

While visiting the *Stephansdom*, St. Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna, Austria, I learned the original reason for the “miter,” the peculiar headdress traditionally worn by bishops in the Roman Catholic Church and certain Anglican denominations. Today it is worn as a sign of high position within their assembly. But this hat, tall and pointed with peaks in front and back, was initially designed to represent the cloven tongues of fire that sat upon the apostles. On the glorious day of Pentecost, God himself provided the apostles’ headdress. God had anointed his Son “with the Holy Ghost and with power” (Acts 10:38). Now Jesus was sharing that anointing with his people. Just as he had promised, the apostles were endued with power from on high.

The baptism of the Holy Ghost is an internal reality. No one could have known that such a thing occurred unless there was some kind of external manifestation. There is no indication that anyone but the apostles saw the “cloven tongues like as of fire.” The undeniable evidence that all could hear and see, the proof that something extraordinary had occurred, was the new language that they were speaking.

And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:4)

God was giving witness that his Spirit would now dwell in human tabernacles. As Paul later wrote, “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you? (1 Cor. 6:19). For this reason, my friend Steve Monahan refers to the gift of tongues as “the secret language of the sanctuary.”

THE WITNESS TO THE WORLD

The gospel light should be exhibited for all to see. “Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee,” says Psalm 60:4, “that it may be displayed because of the truth.” On the glorious day of Pentecost, God did his miracle before representatives of the entire planet!

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. (Acts 2:5)

The streets of Jerusalem were filled with people who had come to observe the feast of Weeks in accordance with the Law of Moses. Some were residents of Jerusalem, but many more had journeyed from foreign countries. Imagine the astonishment of these pilgrims when they heard twelve men from Galilee praising God, not in their native tongue, but in languages known only to the foreigners.

Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. (vv. 6–11)

According to events he had long before set into motion, God gathered men from near and far to witness the marvelous events of this day. These Jews were witnesses not only to the tongues, but also to the healing of the lame man, and Peter’s sermon that led about three thousand souls to the Lord. God had orchestrated events so that the gospel of salvation would travel to “every nation under heaven” in the time it took these men to journey home! How do I know this? Acts 4:20 says, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” Whether “in pretence, or in truth” (Phil. 1:18), Christ was preached.

These days, when men and women gather in church board rooms to discuss ways to promote church membership, the topic almost invariably turns to fund-raising. We make long lists of things we think we need for the work of the church: more land, larger buildings, better musical instruments, improved audio systems, computers, and so on. It is amazing how quickly “conveniences” become “necessities.” How



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did our Christian forefathers manage to advance the Gospel without such things? The answer is simple: They did not rely on things that money could buy. They relied on the Spirit of God.

The one thing we need to further the Gospel is the anointing of God. Without him, we can do nothing. But as Daniel 11:32 says, “The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.” We will accomplish very little with our own plans and schemes. No planning meeting could have ever conceived of something as marvelous as the day of Pentecost.

There had been supernatural wonders and miraculous healings long before the day of Pentecost. Certainly there had been anointed preaching as well. But when God was ready to usher in a new era for his people, he chose to announce it with something new to the world – the gift of tongues. Twelve men from Galilee gave witness to the world with words they could not understand. But as we shall see, that witness is only one of the many benefits of this special gift.



## 15.

### *THE GIFT OF TONGUES IN PRIVATE DEVOTION*

## I WOULD THAT YE ALL SPAKE WITH TONGUES

From the first time people heard Christians speak in tongues until now, this gift has inspired everything from wonder to ridicule. Both reactions were evident on the day of Pentecost. Many people were gloriously amazed, but as Acts 2:13 reports, “Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.” Today, the gift of tongues remains the most misunderstood of the nine gifts of the Spirit. Ignorance coupled with wrong teaching has led to the widespread misuse of this gift. As a result, speaking in tongues has been shunned by the mainstream church, who explain it away as unrestrained emotionalism given way to mania. As for the authentic gift, it is said to have been for a select few in an isolated time.

This is a gross misjudgment, because the gift of tongues is God’s provision to sober-minded Christians who want to fight a good fight and run a good race. Such ignorance is also quite inexcusable. There is as much written about the gift of tongues as any spiritual gift in the Bible. No wonder God says, “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (1 Cor. 12:1).

The Word of the Lord is emphatic: “I would that ye all spake with tongues” (1 Cor. 14:5). Paul declares, “I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all” (v. 18). We need no further proof that God

desires all his children to receive this gift. Let us learn all we can about the gift of tongues – what it is, what it is for, and how it should be used in the church today.

### WITH STAMMERING LIPS AND ANOTHER TONGUE

The earliest allusion to speaking in tongues is found in a prophecy spoken by Isaiah.

For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, *This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear.* (Isaiah 28:11–12)

As with many prophecies in the Bible, the interpretation of this message is multifaceted. The most straightforward interpretation relates to the events surrounding the time of the prophecy. Soon after Isaiah spoke these words, the Assyrian army conquered the ten tribes of Israel, carrying them off into captivity. The strange language of the Assyrians was a daily reminder to the Jews that their own rebelliousness had kept them from entering God's rest. Despite Isaiah's best efforts to lead them to repentance, "yet they would not hear."

When Paul referenced this prophecy in the middle of his discourse on the gift of tongues, he indicated a deeper meaning to Isaiah's words.

In the law it is written, *With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord.* (1 Corinthians 14:21)

On the day of Pentecost, God again spoke to his people with "other tongues and other lips." It was with the tongues of the Gentiles, and not with the language of the Jews, that the apostles miraculously proclaimed the wonderful works of God. That day God used "other tongues and other lips" to extend his invitation to salvation beyond the fold of the children of Israel, "to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). As time passed and believers heard the Gentile converts speak in tongues, they recognized that a new era had indeed begun.

And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God ... (Acts 10:45–46a)

There is yet another side to Isaiah's prophecy. As we previously learned, God has long desired that his people enter into his rest.

## I WOULD THAT YE ALL SPAKE WITH TONGUES

There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his. (Hebrews 4:9–10)

We learned that the weapons of our warfare are for “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:5). Casting down your imaginations includes “casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7). It is in prayer that you cast your cares upon him, and as we shall see, speaking in tongues is a language of prayer. When we pray, we cease from the works of the flesh and place ourselves under the wings of God’s care. Prayer is our way into the presence of God, where we find his rest and refreshing.

And he said, My presence shall go *with thee*, and I will give thee rest. (Exodus 33:14)

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” said Jesus, “and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). Isaiah said, “This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing.” The fact that this age-old promise is associated with speaking in tongues gives us further reason to embrace this wonderful gift.

### THE GIFT OF TONGUES DEFINED

Like all the gifts of the Spirit, the gift of tongues is an “ability which God giveth” (1 Pet. 4:11). It is the ability to do something you could not otherwise do. The gift of tongues is the ability to speak a language that is entirely unknown to you, as God gives you the utterance.

It is unfortunate that *glossolalia*, the Greek term for speaking in tongues, is now used to describe the involuntary babbling that comes from the mentally distressed, or from people under the spell of religious ecstasy. However, the confusion is somewhat understandable. *Glossolalia* (as it is presently defined) is evidenced in many pagan religions and even in certain Christian assemblies where it is misrepresented as the biblical gift. But as Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Speaking in tongues is born of the Spirit; the other is born of the flesh.

When a Christian speaks in tongues, he speaks a language, not gibberish. Even the most basic language is more than a few sounds repeated over and over. Language is the grouping of sounds into words, and words into concepts. The same holds true with the genuine gift of tongues.

1 Corinthians 12:10 tells of diverse “kinds of tongues.” Once again, we are reminded of the fundamental precept, *after his kind*. There are two kinds of tongues: of heaven and of earth. Paul alluded to the two kinds of tongues when he wrote, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). The only way a mortal man could speak with the tongues of angels is by the gift of tongues. When the apostles spoke in tongues on Pentecost, they spoke with the tongues of men.

Among the assembly of believers who speak in tongues, you are certain to hear a variety of utterances, often no two alike. 1 Corinthians 12:28 calls this “diversities of tongues.” How many different dialects exist in heaven and on earth? There is such a wide assortment from which God can choose!

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them *is* without signification. (1 Corinthians 14:10)

### AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE

Acts 2:4 says the apostles “began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” The gift of tongues works in partnership between man and God. Man’s part is to speak; God’s part is to provide the words. As with all the gifts of the Spirit, the recipient must use the gift; the gift does not use him. It is the man, not the Spirit, who speaks with tongues.

In many ways, to speak in tongues is the most difficult thing God ever asks of a believer. There is no logic to support the idea that a man can speak a language he does not know. It is impossible to intellectualize. But faith is not supported by reason; it is upheld by the promises of God.

I have had the joy of leading hundreds of people into the use of this marvelous gift. Sometimes, all that is required is a simple prayer of faith. Other times, more work is needed. Often people come to me with a yearning to speak in tongues that is matched only by their frustration for having failed so many times before. They have traveled hither and yon looking for someone with a powerful enough “anointing” to cause them to speak in tongues. They have had hands laid upon them by the dozen. They have fallen down under this and that man’s spell. Still, they did not speak in tongues. Almost without exception, these poor people were waiting for something to *make them* start speaking in tongues. By the mercies of God, nothing did.

I met such a man in the small town of Kyela, in southwestern Tanzania. It took a great amount of courage for him to come forward to meet me, after years of disappointed effort. With great desire I yearned to help this aged man of God. He had faithfully served the Lord in the face of hardships that would send most Western Christians scurrying away. I could see the fear in his eyes when I told him to speak in tongues. He cried. He trembled. But his lips were sealed as if they were one. He stood before me as silent as a stone. "You must speak," I gently encouraged him. "In order to use this gift, you yourself must speak." Fifteen minutes later, we had made no further progress. The acceptance of failure had begun to settle in his heart. I spoke to him with a directness that surprised even me. "Either you want to do this, or you don't," I said. "If you don't, quit wasting my time." Thanks be to God, the message got through. He realized that *he* had to speak. Soon the tears running down his face were not tears of frustration, but tears of joy. He was finally speaking in tongues.

Holding a trumpet up to your lips does not cause it to sound forth. That instrument will be utterly mute in your hands until you use your lips and your breath to blow through it. The same is true of the gift of tongues. The gift does not *make* you speak in tongues; it makes you *able* to speak in tongues. The gift is the ability. The only tangible evidence that you have *received* the gift of tongues is when you start *speaking* in tongues. As you take that step of faith to begin speaking, God provides the words. Like all the things of God, the concept is very simple. Like all the things of God, the doing of the thing requires faith.

### MY SPIRIT PRAYETH

I was teaching in a coastal town in New South Wales, Australia. There I met a man who said he wanted to speak in tongues. However, he attached a stipulation: he would only speak in tongues if he could understand the words he spoke. I told him that so long as he held that position, he would never speak in tongues. The Bible makes it plain that the product of this gift is always an *unknown* tongue. If you understand the language you are speaking, you are not speaking in tongues.

Why would God want you to speak in words that your mind cannot understand? Language is for communication. Without understanding, there is no communication. But speaking in tongues is not for communicating man to man. When we speak in tongues, we speak and pray to God. Furthermore, it is not my "old man" who speaks to God, but rather "my spirit," which is to say, the "new man."

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

For if I pray in an *unknown* tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. (1 Corinthians 14:14)

The “outer” man benefits not at all. The unknown tongue is always a mystery to him.

For he that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth *him*; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries. (v. 2)

This is the wonder of speaking in tongues, so marvelous it is almost beyond our comprehension. The primary beneficiary of the gift of tongues is not the outer, carnal man. This gift benefits the inner man, the new man in Christ. This is the new creature’s language for communicating with his Creator. By this gift the *inner* man is strengthened, *exercised unto godliness!*

He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself.. (v. 4a)

As you “pray in an unknown tongue,” you are “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph. 3:16). You are “building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost” (Jude 1:20). No other gift of the Spirit is given specifically to strengthen the inner man. What a tremendous asset to putting off the old man and putting on the new!

There are times when the reality of prayer overwhelms me. “I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice,” says Psalm 77:1, “and he gave ear unto me.” I marvel to think that the Creator finds time to listen to my prayers. I cringe when I think of days gone by when my “prayers” to God were nothing more than a list of things I wanted done. Even my offerings of praise were stained with attempts to manipulate God into doing *my* will. I thought I knew exactly what the world needed, politically and spiritually. All I needed was for God to take my good advice.

Have you ever wondered how many Christians asked God to kill Saul of Tarsus? “*Oh, Lord, you know he is a very bad man. He has hurt so many of your people. Rebuke him, Lord! Let him feel the fire of your wrath. Show the world that there are no people like the people of God!*” Of course, God had a different plan in mind for that man, a plan that no mortal person could have guessed. Saul of Tarsus did die, but not in the way people expected. Saul of Tarsus hung on the cross with Jesus. He died with him, he was buried with him, and he rose with him, just like you and me.

If God were plainly visible to us on his throne, do you think we



would speak to him as arrogantly as we do? Do you think we would dare to question his wisdom, and offer him so much advice? I do not think so! When I consider that the God of heaven and earth cares to listen to my prayers, I am brought to my knees in humility and gratitude. As David asked, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:4).

When we speak in tongues, we speak “not unto men, but unto God.” Even better, the things we speak are worthy of his ear. In the spirit we speak mysteries. We speak of things that are too high and too deep for the human mind to comprehend. We bypass the frailties of the carnal mind, and bask in wonderful mysteries, our spirit communing with the Almighty on a higher level than we could ever imagine.

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8–9)

O LORD, how great are thy works! *and* thy thoughts are very deep. (Psalm 92:5)

## TWO KINDS OF PRAYER

As Christians, there are many things we do as a group. We worship together, we fellowship together, and we often study the Bible together. But the most productive time you ever spend as a Christian is when you separate yourself to meet with God in prayer. Jesus called this place of solitude your “closet.”

And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (Matthew 6:5–6)

In the sixth chapter of Matthew, Jesus spoke of doing alms, praying, and fasting. His message was clear: it is the things that we do for God in secret, for his eyes only, that mean the most to him. It is for those secret things that we stand to receive the greatest reward.

For God *is* not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. (Hebrews 6:10)

The primary purpose of the gift of tongues is not public worship

but private devotion. Speaking in tongues was never intended to be a spectacle. This gift is meant for your prayer closet. It is a private matter, a time of communion between you and your heavenly Father.

There is no greater contribution that a Christian can make towards the furtherance of the Gospel than through his prayers. Paul asked the believers to pray “that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19). James 5:16 says, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” What a difference the gift of tongues makes to our prayer life! It enables us to pray with great effect. A believer equipped with the gift of tongues can pray with the understanding, and also with the spirit.

What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also. (1 Corinthians 14:15)

To “pray with the understanding” is to pray in the language of your mind, according to your understanding. To “pray with the spirit” is to pray in tongues, aided by the perfect understanding of God. Prayers of our understanding can be inspired *by* the Spirit, but that is not the same thing as praying *with* the spirit. That is why some Christians refer to tongues as a “prayer language.” God perfects our prayers by giving us the words to pray. When we pray with the spirit, the Spirit makes intercession for us.

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. (Romans 8:26)

As the Spirit makes intercession for us, we are enabled to make perfect intercession for the saints.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints .... (Ephesians 6:18)

By the gift of tongues, we are also helped in our duty to pray for those in governmental authority over us. Imagine how different this world would be if every critical word spoken against our civil leaders was matched – much less replaced – by a word of prayer!

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and *for* all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. (1 Timothy 2:1-2)

## I WOULD THAT YE ALL SPAKE WITH TONGUES

A healthy prayer life consists of more than making known our needs and supplications. "In every thing give thanks," says 1 Thessalonians 5:18, "for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." But often we cannot find adequate words to express our gratitude to God. Here, we see the Lord's answer to the supplication of Psalm 51:15: "O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise." When you speak in tongues, "thou verily givest thanks well" (1 Cor. 14:17). God fills our mouth with the words we need to thank him.

The gift of tongues is one of God's greatest provisions to ensure that we have "sufficient to finish." When we speak in tongues, we are strengthened by his might in the inner man, rejuvenated by his presence, and assisted in our prayer duties. Certainly we can see why God says, "I would that ye all spake with tongues."



## 16.

### THE GIFT OF TONGUES IN THE CHURCH

## GOD IS NOT THE AUTHOR OF CONFUSION

Ecclesiastes 3:1 testifies, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” This precept is true even concerning the Word of God itself. Every word in the Bible is a right word (“For the word of the LORD is right,” says Psalm 33:4), but even a right word can be spoken at the wrong time. Proverbs 27 provides an amusing illustration:

He that blesseth his friend with a loud voice, rising early in the morning, it shall be counted a curse to him. (Proverbs 27:14)

It is easy to imagine this loud fellow, full of enthusiasm for a new day. “This is the day which the Lord hath made,” he exclaims to his slumbering companion, “we will rejoice and be glad in it!” But his friend only groans, and buries his face deeper into his pillow. Those fine words bring him no joy. He counts that blessing a curse! It was the right word spoken at the wrong time. A word *fitly* spoken is a word spoken at the right time, in its due season.

A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth: and a word *spoken* in due season, how good *is it!* (Proverbs 15:23)

A word *fitly* spoken *is like* apples of gold in pictures of silver. (Proverbs 25:11)

The precept that a word should be “fitly spoken” is very relevant to

our study of the gift of tongues. There is a time when a word spoken in tongues is *fittly* spoken, and a time when it is not. The fact is, the controversy surrounding speaking in tongues would not exist if Christians used this gift as God intended. Isaiah 50:4 says, "The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." Let us seek the Lord's wisdom to know the proper time and season to speak in tongues.

### SET IN ORDER THE THINGS THAT ARE WANTING

So far we have considered the gift of tongues only as it is used in private devotion, within the seclusion of a believer's "prayer closet." Although that is the primary use of this gift, it is not its only use. The gift of tongues can also be used in the public assembly of church. However, in order to be *fittly* spoken, this gift must be used under the tutelage of the Word of God.

The Bible says that God "worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). This truth speaks of cooperation, not control. We are not marionette puppets tied to our Master's fingers. Divine impulse and human response come together in faith.

It is wrong to suggest that Christians should let the Spirit "take control" over their lives at any time. This is a dangerous misconception that can lead sincere people on a path that ends in spiritualism. This doctrine has also opened the door for chaos to enter the House of God. Anyone who feels "inspired" is given license to disrupt the proceedings.

When Paul visited Corinth, he discovered that everyone came to church ready to contribute. "When ye come together," he said, "every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation" (1 Cor. 14:26). This was not a problem; this was a *blessing*. The problem was that the assembly was out of order. Everyone spoke at once and as a result, no one could understand a word being said. The onslaught of sounds melded into one great noise. The human ear cannot separate different messages layered over each other.

Paul set the Corinthian church in order. He taught them that there was a time to speak and a time to keep silent. Paul corrected the erroneous notion that we are under the control of the Spirit when we use the gifts of the Spirit. He showed them that we possess the gifts; the gifts do not possess us. What was true for the prophets (who along with their wives were the most inclined to speak out whenever they

felt the urge) was true for all the members of the congregation.

Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If *any thing* be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. (1 Corinthians 14:29–32)

Paul's instruction to the church was based on this bedrock truth: For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. (v. 33)

If the gifts of the Spirit operated entirely under the Spirit's control, it would be impossible to misuse them. The fact that there are rules governing their use proves otherwise. It is not God who determines whether the gifts are used properly or in mayhem. That responsibility falls upon the believers.

2 Corinthians 3:17 says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." Where there is liberty, there is also order. Without order, there is confusion, and God does not cause confusion. By the Spirit of God, Paul led the Corinthians to liberty. He did this when he brought them out of chaos into order. This is a vital part of the work of the ministry, as can be learned from Paul's charge to Titus:

For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee .... (Titus 1:5)

It is the work of the presbytery (that is to say, the governing ministers) to "set in order the things that are wanting." That is the reason for the ordination of elders in the church. The church is like a flock of sheep, and the nature of sheep is to go astray. That is why we need shepherds. Hebrews 13:20 calls Jesus "that great shepherd of the sheep." Our great Shepherd has departed to heaven, but he has not left his flock unattended. He is like a man on a distant journey, who entrusted the care of his goods to his servants.

For *the kingdom of heaven is* as a man travelling into a far country, *who* called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. (Matthew 25:14–15)

While he is away, the Lord has charged certain individuals with the care and oversight of his flock. Those who faithfully perform their duties are promised a good reward.

Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight *thereof*, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over *God's* heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. (1 Peter 5:2-4)

Nothing simply falls into place. Quite the opposite, things left unattended always fall into disarray. Order must be established and maintained. This is especially necessary in the House of God. Then the church will be a haven of peace and not a den of confusion.

In the days of Solomon it was the king's duty to direct the temple worship and set the service in order. "According to the order of David his father," King Solomon appointed "the courses of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their charges, to praise and minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required" (2 Chron. 8:14). 2 Chronicles 29:35 concludes, "So the service of the house of the LORD was set in order." In the New Testament, it was Paul who established the pattern for order in the church.

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

The Word of God is adamant: "Let all things be done decently and in order," says 1 Corinthians 14:40. When the gifts of God are fitly spoken, their effect will be as he intended.

### TONGUES ARE FOR A SIGN

Before he ascended into heaven, Jesus foretold a time when "signs shall follow them that believe" (Mark 16:17). One of the signs he promised was "they shall speak with new tongues," a prophecy that was first fulfilled on Pentecost.

Some signs are universal; others speak to a select few. Street signs help us identify our location whether we are driving or walking. Parking signs are helpful for drivers, but not necessarily for pedestrians. Tongues are for a sign, but for whom is the sign intended? 1 Corinthians 14:22 says, "Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not."

Speaking in tongues is a sign to those who do not know the Lord. When used properly, this sign points them to Christ. When the gift is misused, the result is completely reversed. You could say the sign of tongues becomes to them an "exit" sign to leave the building! Con-



sider the warning of the next verse:

If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in *those that are* unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? (v. 23)

Who could deny that this is *exactly* what has happened as a result of the misuse of the gift of tongues? Most unbelievers associate speaking in tongues with frenetic prayer meetings filled with the sound of bedlam. Is it any wonder that they want nothing to do with such a religion? Our Lord knows the minds of men, and he tells us what people will think when they see such things. They will think they have stumbled into an asylum! That is why the Bible expressly forbids people from simultaneously speaking in tongues out loud.

If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most *by* three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God. (vv. 27–28)

It is frustrating when the same people who accept the authenticity of the gift of tongues reject the validity of the rules governing its use. In a class I was teaching in the city of Matamoros, Mexico, a woman defiantly told me, “I do not care if people think I am crazy. I know that speaking in tongues is a good thing.” I told her that *she* might not care, but God certainly did. Why else would he include such a stern warning in his Word? When Christians assemble for worship, there should never be an audible manifestation of the gift of tongues unless it is accompanied by interpretation. Otherwise, all speaking in tongues should be uttered in silence, “to himself, and to God.”

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord... (Ephesians 5:19)

The only time it is appropriate for you to speak in tongues *without interpretation* is when no one but God can hear you. This instruction is not given to curtail your use of the gift. As Paul said, “Forbid not to speak with tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39). This instruction directs you into a higher use of the gift, so that your words are *fitly spoken*. Do not dwell upon the restrictions; think instead of the opportunities that are now open to you. Think of the *secret* service you can accomplish for the Lord. You can pray in tongues throughout your church service, making perfect intercession for your pastor during his entire sermon. You can pray in tongues for the storekeeper while you shop, for the

teacher at your school, or for your government officials as you pay your taxes. You can properly pray in tongues in any place, at any time, so long as you speak quietly, loud enough for only you and God to hear.

### WHAT SHALL I PROFIT YOU?

It is easy to understand why audible speaking in tongues without interpretation has no place in the assembly of believers. As Paul asked, "What shall I profit you?"

Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine? And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle? (1 Corinthians 14:6-8)

As we have seen, speaking in tongues is profitable for the edification of the inner man. But speaking in tongues does nothing for the man of the flesh, because he cannot understand the words being said. Yes, it does a good work inside the one who is speaking, but for everyone else, it is without value.

As Paul reasoned, who can prepare himself for battle if he does not recognize the sound of the call? A modern parallel can be seen at international sporting events. It is customary for the audience to rise to their feet during the performance of a national anthem. People are often caught off guard when an anthem is not of their homeland, and therefore unfamiliar to them. They look to each other for clues, not knowing whether to sit or stand.

Over the last decade I have done most of my teaching in countries far from my home. Without the services of an interpreter, all my labor would be in vain. I might as well be speaking in Chimpanzee. Despite my best effort I would be speaking into the air.

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. (v. 9)

When we speak in tongues, we speak in tongues of men or angels. Except on rare occasions, that tongue will be foreign to every person present. (On the day of Pentecost some people in the audience understood one or more of the tongues being uttered; but that was a particularly special occasion, the exception rather than the

rule.) An assembly of people all speaking in tongues would be a present-day reenactment of the tower of Babel.

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them *is* without signification. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh *shall be* a barbarian unto me. (vv. 10–11)

If I walked down the streets of my hometown greeting people with the words “Meisisi Enkai!” I would get many puzzled looks in return. Some people might even get angry, thinking I had cursed them. Only those who are familiar with the language of the Maasai would know to respond, “Amen!” to a greeting which translates, “Praise God!” The same principle is true for speaking in tongues.

Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified (vv. 16–17)

Once again, language is for communication. Speaking in tongues is for communication between your spirit and God. It is useless for communicating man to man. For this reason, the audible manifestation of the gift of tongues has no place in the church, unless it is interpreted.

I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that *by my voice* I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an *unknown* tongue. (vv. 18–19)

### IF ANY MAN BE IGNORANT

Some people refuse to change, even after they have been clearly instructed. Sadly, the misuse of the gift of tongues by the ignorant and rebellious will continue to tarnish the reputation of the spiritual gifts. Those who are spiritually minded will have ears to hear his instruction. As for the others, God has a word as well.

If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant. (vv. 37–38)

Not all Christians are content to dwell in ignorance. Many have great desire to be instructed in the biblical use of the gifts of the Spirit. They have long suspected that what they have seen so far *cannot* be

right. It is therefore the responsibility of those who have been properly taught to set their brethren in order concerning these things.

Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak *this* to your shame.

(1 Corinthians 15:34)

Throughout the ages, seven of the nine gifts of the Spirit were given to servants of God to help them in their service to him. Only two of the nine gifts – the gift of tongues and the gift of the interpretation of tongues – were reserved for this dispensation only, to strengthen the church during the “latter days.” This fact alone should exhort us towards the proper use of these gifts. Next, we will learn how the gift of tongues can be used in conjunction with the gift of the interpretation of tongues to serve the church in another wonderful way.

## 17.

### *THE GIFT OF THE INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES*

### THE MEANING OF THE VOICE

A man once asked me if I understood every verse in the Bible and if not, how could I call myself a Bible teacher? I answered that I most certainly did not understand every verse, and if that were the qualification, there would be no one fit for the job. The Bible clearly states that no mortal man fully comprehends the truth. At the very best, we “see through a glass darkly.”

For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. (1 Corinthians 13:12)

Our present condition is similar to the blind man of Bethsaida whose eyesight was restored by Jesus. After the Lord first ministered to him, his eyesight was better, but not perfect.

And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him. And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put *his* hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly. (Mark 8:22–25)

For now, our spiritual eyesight has been partially restored. We see glimpses of truth and experience moments of enlightenment. Such moments are precious indeed, but they are only a glimmer of the wonder that awaits us when we see Jesus face to face.

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

For now, we see through a glass darkly. We are not yet fully enlightened to the truth. Even the Word of light can be to us a “dark saying.”

To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings. (Proverbs 1:6)

The words of the wise are not called dark sayings because they are sinister. They are called dark because their meaning is hidden. In order for them to be understood, they must be brought to light. In other words, they must be interpreted.

## INTERPRETING THE SCRIPTURES

Jesus did more than quote the Scriptures. He also explained their meaning. He interpreted the Word of God. The Gospel of Matthew gives a wonderful example of this. The Pharisees were angry with Jesus because he “went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat” (Matt. 12:1). The Pharisees accused him, saying, “Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day” (v. 2). Jesus knew that their accusations were rooted in their misinterpretation of the Law. He answered, “If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day” (vv. 7–8).

Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6: “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” Then he interpreted that verse. God’s intent in giving the Law to Israel was not to bring them to condemnation, but to redemption. The sacrifices, the burnt offerings, and the Sabbaths were not an end to themselves. The Law was given to show man that he needed a Savior.

In the days of Ezra the prophet, there was great rejoicing when the servants of God “read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Neh. 8:8). In his day also, Jesus “gave the sense” of the Word of truth.

He taught the correct interpretation of the Scriptures. This is the endeavor of every honest teacher of the Bible.

Bible teachers have two great responsibilities. First, they must “give the sense” of the Bible by teaching the meaning and application of the Word of God. They must give the interpretation of the Scriptures, keeping in mind the precept of 2 Peter 1:20, “that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.” Second, they must be able to communicate these truths in a way that the congregation can understand.

On the day of my ordination, the Lord said to me by way of a word of prophecy, “Thou art a teacher of my Word. Therefore, bend thy strength to make what thou sayest of me and my ways plain to them that hear.” Through these words, I discovered the purpose of my ministry. I know my service to God will be judged according to my faithfulness to this directive. But learning to teach the precepts of God in a way that is “plain to them that hear” has not come easy to me. It is one thing to know what I want to say. It is another thing to know how to say it simply.

The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and *that which was written was upright, even words of truth.*  
(Ecclesiastes 12:10)

A proven chef uses herbs and spices to enhance the natural flavor of the food. An inexperienced cook will often use those seasonings in a way that overwhelms all other flavors. The same can be said of many speakers and writers. They leave us marveling at their skill with words, but wondering what it is they said! If people do not understand the words you are speaking, you will do them no good. You might as well speak into the air.

So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? for ye shall speak into the air. (1 Corinthians 14:9)

As Paul wrote, “If I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me” (1 Cor. 14:11). This is true in teaching, and it is also true as it concerns the gift of tongues in church. We must be able to communicate the meaning of the voice.

## INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION

In order to translate by natural ability, you must be skilled in both the language you are translating from, and the language into which

you are translating. You must understand the rules of grammar for both languages. You must know how to interpret figurative expressions and idioms. For example, during a heavy rain, Americans will say, “It is raining cats and dogs.” In Greece they say, “It is raining chair legs.” Either expression is ridiculous when translated literally.

English signs in non-English-speaking countries are often unintentionally amusing. In a Hong Kong tailor shop, a sign said, “Ladies may have a fit upstairs.” It is true that a woman may go to a tailor to have her new clothes altered, or “fitted.” But she will only “have a fit,” or become upset, if she does not approve of his craftsmanship.

An experienced translator knows he cannot simply match one word for another out of a language dictionary, and expect his final product to make sense. Browse the “classics” section of any library, and you will see numerous English versions of Homer’s *Odyssey*, or Dante’s *Inferno*. A certain amount of interpretation is required of any translation. This is the reason for the italicized words in the King James Version of the Bible. These additions were necessary to communicate the sense of the original language. Without them, the English version would be incomplete.

The term *interpretation* is most often used for an oral translation, while a *translation* takes written form. There is also a difference between a Bible *translation* (e.g. the Swahili Bible) and a Bible *interpretation*, or commentary. But as long as these words – interpretation and translation – are used to describe the process of converting one language into another, they can be used synonymously.

## INTERPRETATION IN THE BIBLE

To make unknown or difficult words “easy to be understood” is the essence of biblical interpretation. For example, in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet describes a beast with four faces: that of a man, of a lion, of an ox, and of an eagle.

As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle. (Ezekiel 1:10)

The book of Revelation contains a similar vision.

And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle. (Revelation 4:7)



Once interpreted, these passages are easy to understand. The unusual beast of Ezekiel and the four beasts of Revelation represent the four “faces” of the Messiah. Each of the four Gospels was written to present Jesus in a particular light. Matthew presents Jesus as the lion, the King of kings. Mark presents him as an ox, the servant of man. Luke presents him as a man, the Son of Man. John presents Jesus as an eagle, the Son of God.

The Gospel of John shows Jesus as the Savior to the entire world, and not only to the Jews. This is why this Gospel includes the interpretation of certain Jewish words and traditions that may not be familiar to Gentiles. Here we see the Hebrew words *Rabbi* and *Messias* interpreted for the reader.

Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? (John 1:38)

He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. (v. 41)

## THE INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES

So far we have considered only the interpretation of known words. But the biblical directive is also very clear about *unknown* words, that is to say, words spoken by the gift of tongues. In church, if any man audibly speaks in tongues, it should be accompanied by interpretation.

If any man speak in an *unknown* tongue, *let it be* by two, or at the most *by* three, and *that* by course; and let one interpret. (1 Corinthians 14:27)

There are no examples given in the Bible of anyone using the gift of tongues together with the gift of the interpretation of tongues to bring forth a message from God. However, here are some examples of simple interpretation that serve well to teach us about the use of these gifts:

And he [Jesus] took the damsel by the hand, and said unto her, Talitha cumi; which is, being interpreted, Damsel, I say unto thee, arise. (Mark 5:41)

Most Bible scholars believe that these strange words, “Talitha cumi,” are either Syrian or Aramaic in origin. But imagine if all that was written was, “And he took the damsel by the hand and said unto her, Talitha cumi.” Without the provided interpretation, we would have no idea what Jesus meant. Now, for the sake of teaching, let us say

that the words “talitha cumi” were born of the gift of tongues, and the words “Damsel, I say unto thee, arise” were born of the gift of the interpretation of tongues. If that were the case, this verse would be a prime example of how the gift of tongues is used in conjunction with the gift of the interpretation of tongues. When these two gifts are properly used, the words in tongues are spoken first, followed immediately by the interpretation. Jesus said, “Talitha cumi. Damsel, I say unto thee, arise.”

We can use the strange words of Matthew 27:46 to make the same point. If those words had been uttered by the gift of tongues, and the meaning of the words brought forth by the gift of the interpretation of tongues, we would read, “Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’”

The gift of the interpretation of tongues is the companion gift to the gift of tongues. It is the ability God gives whereby you can speak forth, in words of your understanding, the significance of those words that were just spoken by the gift of tongues.

You cannot use a natural ability to interpret a supernatural language, nor can you use a supernatural ability to interpret a natural language. Everything must remain in its category. Everything must be “after its kind.” Once again, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” When a Christian speaks in tongues and interprets, the interpretation he brings forth is not by natural ability. Using a supernatural ability from God – the gift of the interpretation of tongues – he is able to speak forth the meaning of what was spoken in another tongue, even though the tongue itself remains unknown to him.

### OUT OF HIS BELLY SHALL FLOW RIVERS OF LIVING WATER

The gift of the interpretation of tongues works by inspiration, not revelation. Just like when you speak in tongues, the words you speak are born *as you speak*. You do not know what your next word will be until you hear yourself say it. The only difference is that with the gift of the interpretation of tongues, you speak in a language that you actually know. (If you don’t already speak Japanese, for example, you will not bring forth a message in Japanese.) The words flow from within you without rehearsal or premeditation.

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the

Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) (John 7:38–39)

When the children of Israel thirsted in the wilderness, God “caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them” (Isa. 48:21). Years later, it was revealed to Paul that “they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4). The words we speak by the Holy Ghost will also flow, because they flow from the Rock.

### LET HIM PRAY THAT HE MAY INTERPRET

1 Corinthians 14:5 says, “I would that ye all spake with tongues.” Could the will of God be plainer than that? Precept upon precept, God leads us further into the way of truth.

Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are zealous of spiritual *gifts*, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church. Wherefore let him that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue pray that he may interpret. (vv. 12–13)

God wants you to receive the gift of tongues so you can be edified in the inner man. He wants you to receive the gift of the interpretation of tongues as well, so you can “excel to the edification of the church.”

How do you receive this gift? You do not need to wait for a fresh anointing, or for the presbytery to lay hands on you. God wants you to ask him directly. A Christian should “pray that he may interpret,” knowing full well that our heavenly Father does not tell us to ask for something that he will not provide.

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if *he ask* a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall *your* heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him? (Luke 11:11–13)

When used in conjunction with the gift of tongues, the gift of the interpretation of tongues adds life to a prayer meeting. It is good to speak to God; it is better to hear from him. That is what this gift is for. One by one, you and other members of your church can bring forth messages of edification, exhortation, and comfort from the Lord to your congregation. By faith, you audibly speak in tongues. Very often, while you are still speaking in tongues, God will give you the first few words of the interpretation, just to get you started. Now you speak out

the rest of the message, making no attempt to steer the words you say. Your part is to speak. God's part is to provide the message.

To compose a message that will minister to the unspoken needs of an entire congregation exceeds human capability. To deliver that kind of message by the gift of tongues and the gift of the interpretation of tongues requires only the faith of a child.

A six-year-old girl from the United States was a student in a class I was teaching on the spiritual gifts. Like many Christians, she was worried whether she would be able to use these gifts properly. But once she put her fear aside, she brought forth a beautiful message, a message that just flowed out of her. When it was over, she looked up at me and whispered, "It just keeps coming out!" What a wonderful example to us all!

## 18.

### *THE GIFT OF THE INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES*

#### THAT THE CHURCH MAY RECEIVE EDIFYING

Of the nine gifts of the Spirit, only the gift of tongues is given primarily to benefit the individual recipient. All the other gifts are tools for service to the church. The best way to use those gifts, then, is in the way that best serves the congregation. For this reason Paul preferred the gift of prophecy to the gift of tongues in congregational meetings.

I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater *is* he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying. (1 Corinthians 14:5)

By example, Paul encouraged Christians to use the gift of tongues profusely. “I thank my God,” he said, “I speak with tongues more than ye all” (v. 18). But in the assembly of the church, Paul was not concerned with what was good for him, but what was good for others. “If I come unto you speaking in tongues,” he asked, “what shall I profit you?” (v. 6). That is why he said, “In the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (v. 19). Speaking in tongues is a good thing, but it quickly becomes self-indulgent when it is misused. “Thou verily givest thanks well,” Paul said, “but

the other is not edified” (v. 18). That is why, in the church, prophecy is better than tongues.

He that speaketh in an *unknown* tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. (v. 4)

Four is greater than two, unless you add two more. Then the sum of two plus two is equal to four. He that brings forth words of prophecy, spoken in the language of the congregation, does a greater service to the church than he that speaks with tongues, unless that man also interprets. Then the sum of tongues plus the interpretation of tongues is equal to prophecy.

When the gift of tongues is used in combination with the gift of the interpretation of tongues, the resulting benefit is the same as prophecy. The church will receive edifying. No matter how it is born, an inspired message from God will always speak unto men “to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (v. 3).

## EDIFICATION

There is no doubt that Jesus loved Peter, and that the Lord always had Peter’s best interest in mind. At the same time, Peter’s contemporaries might have thought differently. As far as they could tell, Peter always seemed to be on the wrong side of the Lord. He was the one who continually received Jesus’ harshest reproof.

But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. (Matthew 16:23)

As Peter knew so well, the word of the Lord is not always easy on our ears. There is often a difference between the things we *want* to hear and the things we *need* to hear. Therefore, we must maintain a desire for truth, even when the truth hurts!

My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. (Proverbs 3:11–12)

It is not always easy to appreciate this, but Hebrews 12:6 says, “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” I am glad to say that, in light of this verse, I know the Lord loves me. (Sometimes I wonder if I am not his *favorite*!) I can also add a big “Amen” when I read, “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous” (v. 11a). My experience has been that the chastisement of the Lord, and a spiritual attack from Satan feel much the same! However, the attacks

of Satan are unto my destruction, and the chastisement of the Lord “yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (v. 11b).

God forbid that in weariness of being continually reprov'd, we lose our appetite for truth. “Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way,” says Proverbs 15:10, “and he that hateth reproof shall die.” This is what happened in the days of Isaiah. The people of God grew tired of hearing his words of reproof. They preferred pretty deceits to the ugly truth.

That this *is* a rebellious people, lying children, children *that* will not hear the law of the LORD: Which say to the seers, See not; and to the prophets, Prophecy not unto us right things, speak unto us smooth things, prophesy deceits .... (Isaiah 30:9–10)

Why would anyone prefer falsehood to truth? Jesus, who “knew what was in man,” (John 2:25) said, “Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). It is uncomfortable for sinful man to come to the light. It is painful to honestly see ourselves for what we are. Paul said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom. 7:24). But it is only when we are sufficiently discomforted by our present condition that we will find the determination to change.

A gardener knows there is much work to do before he ever plants the seeds. The prophet Jeremiah had much to teach the Judeans, but they could not receive it until he had first torn down and uprooted their false doctrines. Only then could he begin to build and plant.

See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant. (Jeremiah 1:10)

For many years, I lived in an American town on the border of Mexico. Crossing the border was not difficult, so when I needed to have some dental work done, I went into Mexico to find a dentist. I was happy to learn that the procedure would be much less expensive than in the United States. I was not so happy when I realized the reason why. This dentist did not use anything to numb my mouth before she started drilling my tooth. I almost jumped out of my chair! “Didn’t you forget something?” I asked. She told me not to worry; that she had a “light touch.” Well, she told the truth, and the experience was surprisingly pain-free. I learned a valuable lesson as well. Sometimes, when people come to us for help, we need to root out, and pull down, and destroy, and throw down, before we can build and plant. But this does

not mean we have to go about our business with brute force. When the message is difficult, it is good to have a light touch!

The aim of edification is not a better self-image. The aim of edification is growth. If you think you are fine as you are, then you will not go through the pain of changing. I would have preferred for that dentist to tell me that my teeth were all in perfect condition, but only if it were true. I would not want her to lie to me, and then be left to wonder why all my teeth fell out! A message of edification may not bring instant happiness, but it will have long-term benefits. It will provide instruction in faith and holiness. It will be the thing we need to hear if we want to grow in the Lord.

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. (Romans 14:19)

... Let all things be done unto edifying. (1 Corinthians 14:26b)

## EXHORTATION

In Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia he wrote, "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (Gal. 6:9). From time to time, every Christian will grow weary in the spiritual battle. We long for the day when everything is made right, and our troubles are things of the past. Paul wrote that we "groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body" (Rom. 8:23). "We groan," he said, "earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven" (2 Cor. 5:2). "We groan," he said, "being burdened" (v. 4). In our times of weariness and frustration, we need a word to stir us up, and set us back on our feet. We need a word that will do for us what it did for Ezekiel.

And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me. (Ezekiel 2:1-2)

We need a word that will stir us up, like the word given by Peter.

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in *both* which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance .... (2 Peter 3:1)

There is a fire within us, a noble spirit that is not intimidated by the challenges of the day. This spirit longs to be awakened, stirred into action. "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard?" asks Proverbs 6:9, "when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" "Now it is high time to awake out of sleep," says Romans 13:11.



Whether the message of the Lord comes by prophecy or the gift of tongues with interpretation, it will stir us up in exhortation. It will pour strength into our bones, and conviction into our heart. Like this word from Jude, it will remind us to “contend for the faith.”

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. (Jude 1:3)

Like this word from Hebrews, it will remind us to stand together.

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Hebrews 10:25)

Like this word from 1 Thessalonians, it will rouse us out of complacency and urge us towards new heights.

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, *so* ye would abound more and more. (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

It has been said that the darkest hour comes just before the dawn. The great day of the Lord is quickly approaching. You and I need only to remain faithful for a little while longer. “For yet a little while,” says Psalm 37:10, “and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.” “For yet a little while,” says Hebrews 10:37, “and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.” Our days of laboring in the fields of the Lord will soon be over. Let us “exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). Now is our time to stand for God, while it is called today.

## COMFORT

Many people live in a world without hope and without meaning, knowing neither joy nor comfort. Happiness is only fleeting, while despair is a constant companion. As Solomon noted, the oppressor has no pity for the oppressed.

So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of *such as were* oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors *there was* power; but they had no comforter. (Ecclesiastes 4:1)

The marketplace has many opiates to choose from, some that deaden the body and others that deaden the mind. No Christian

should ever need to follow such an artificial and deadly road of false comfort. Jesus has promised, “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:18). Our heavenly Father promises, “I, even I, am he that comforteth you” (Isa. 51:12).

Because we are in the midst of a spiritual fight, we will face times of suffering and sorrow. You cannot be in a fight without getting hit. But you will not last long in the spiritual battle if you run home each time that you get a bloody nose. Once again, ours is the best of all possible worlds. God does not leave his people comfortless. The inspired message of God, whether it is born of the gift of tongues with the interpretation of tongues, or by the gift of prophecy, will be unto us a word of comfort. It will relieve us from our distress, bringing us into remembrance of the goodness of God.

But the Comforter, *which is* the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26)

It is no small thing that God refers to himself as the God of all comfort. It is not that he removes the cause of our tribulation. He does something better. He gives us what we need to face our problems. Then, by our example, we can help others face their own troubles as well.

Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. (2 Corinthians 1:3–4)

## THE GOODNESS OF GOD

In Matthew 18:20, Jesus promised, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” For too many churchgoers, these words are meaningless. Week after week, they see no evidence of the presence of Christ in their assembly. No wonder they have to be badgered into keeping up their attendance. What a difference it makes when, by the gifts of the Spirit, the Lord speaks to the congregation of his people with words of edification, exhortation, and comfort. Like the oil that ran down Aaron’s beard, these words are soothing to our souls, and cause us to be glad for the assembling of the saints.

Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity! *It is* like the precious ointment upon the head,

that ran down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments .... (Psalm 133:1-2)

How contrary it is to God's design when his people come together to be comforted, only to be assaulted from the pulpit with words of condemnation and criticism. Yes, a hardhearted congregation can frustrate a pastor, but such methods will only further frustrate his cause. There is only one path that leads to repentance.

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

The Greek philosopher Aesop told a story about an argument between the Wind and the Sun over who was more powerful. When the Wind saw a man walking down the street wearing a heavy coat, he said to the Sun, "Whoever can make that man's coat come off his back is more powerful. I will go first!" The Wind blew and blew, trying to blow that man's coat off his back. But the more he blew, the tighter the man gripped his coat around him. Finally, the Wind gave up. Now it was the Sun's turn. He came out from behind the clouds and started to shine with the warmth of a beautiful summer day. The man smiled as he realized the wind had stopped blowing, and he lifted his face to the sky to bask in the heavenly comfort. He stopped struggling with his coat, and went back to enjoying his walk. He started to whistle, and then, in a flash, he took off his coat and threw it over his shoulder.

Making people feel guilty and condemned will only drive them away. Instead, teach them of God's goodness, and they will be led to repentance and a closer walk with him.

Why do you love God as you do? Understand this, and you will know how to inspire greater love for God in others. "We love him," says 1 John 4:19, "because he first loved us."



## 19.

### THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

### THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

The gift of prophecy is the last of the three edification gifts to be considered in this study. Like the combined gifts of tongues and the interpretation of tongues, the gift of prophecy is used for bringing messages from the Lord to his people. But unlike the gift of tongues, this gift is not a sign to unbelievers. It is a sign to them that believe.

Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying *serveth* not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

(1 Corinthians 14:22)

There is a difference between the gift of prophecy and the ministry of a prophet. Having the gift of prophecy does not make someone a prophet. All believers can have the *gift* of prophecy, if they have the faith to receive it. The *ministry* of a prophet is an appointment made by God to select individuals. Hebrews 5:4 says, "No man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." A prophet is one of the five so-called "gift ministries" in the church.

And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ .... (Ephesians 4:11-12)

Whether a person calls himself a prophet, or claims to speak by the gift of prophecy, he is representing himself as a spokesman of the Lord. Therefore, his words must be very carefully weighed. This is especially true in light of the repeated warnings from Jesus concerning false prophets.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. (Matthew 24:11)

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

When you think about it, the Bible is a comparatively short book. The Bible I most often carry has only 1,700 pages – the length of three or four paperback novels. The four Gospels combine for only 178 pages. Yet the final verse of the Gospel of John reads, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). Clearly, our heavenly Father had an abundance of material to choose from in telling the story of his Son! He must have included only that part which was most vital to our instruction in righteousness. How much more then should we heed those portions he chose to repeat! Three times in one Gospel, Jesus gave warning about false prophets. The threat of their deception must be very real indeed.

Of all the spiritual gifts, prophecy is the easiest to counterfeit, and therefore the most difficult to appraise. Prophecy produces only words, not deeds, and words are very easily spoken. Words can sound very reasonable, and still be deadly wrong. They can sound quite preposterous, and yet be the Word of the Lord. Clearly, we need to learn as much as we can about the gift of prophecy.

### AS THEY WERE MOVED BY THE HOLY GHOST

Jeremiah is one of the greatest prophets of the Bible. He was sent to a difficult people, with a difficult message, in a difficult time. He prophesied to the proud and arrogant citizens of Judah in the years surrounding the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian exile. He foretold the great destruction that awaited them unless they repented of their wickedness, and submitted to the will of God. As you can imagine, this made him an outcast in Judean society. Let it register deep

within our souls that the measure of truth is never its popularity.

Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. (Luke 6:26)

The false prophets of Judah won the hearts of the people by flatteries and led them to reject Jeremiah's call to repentance. "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so," says the Lord in Jeremiah 5:31. The false prophets made a mockery of sin, as if it were only a childish superstition, and promised a rosy future of peace, prosperity, and safety.

They say still unto them that despise me, The LORD hath said, Ye shall have peace; and they say unto every one that walketh after the imagination of his own heart, No evil shall come upon you. (Jeremiah 23:17)

But God knows who is speaking for him and who is not.

I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they should have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. (vv. 21–22)

Just because someone says, "Thus saith the Lord," does not mean that his words are divinely inspired. You can train a parrot to say, "Thus saith the Lord."

I have heard what the prophets said, that prophesy lies in my name, saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. How long shall *this* be in the heart of the prophets that prophesy lies? yea, *they* are prophets of the deceit of their own heart .... (vv. 25–26).

What is the difference between false prophecy and true prophecy? False prophecy is conceived in the heart of man. It is "a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of the LORD" (Jer. 23:16). True prophecy comes from the heart of God. "The Spirit of the LORD spake by me," says 2 Samuel 23:2, "and his word was in my tongue."

For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost. (2 Peter 1:21)

The gift of prophecy is the ability God gives whereby you can speak forth, in the language of your understanding, a message directly from the heart of God to his people, a message that will be unto their edification, exhortation, and comfort.

Prophecy is the testimony of Jesus. If Christ were bodily present to bless us with a word, the heart of his message would not differ from that of any believer correctly using this selfsame gift. True prophecy will always bear witness of Christ. As Revelation 19:10 declares, “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

### THE PROPHETIC BIRTHS OF JOHN AND JESUS

In the Gospel of Luke, we read of a priest named Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth. “They were both righteous before God,” says Luke 1:6, “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” Still, there was one area in their life where Zacharias and Elisabeth were sorely disappointed. They had reached their senior years without knowing the blessing of parenthood.

One day as Zacharias was fulfilling his duties in the temple, the angel of the Lord came to him. “Fear not, Zacharias,” he said, “for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John” (v. 13).

This was not the first time that God had sent an announcement of an unexpected birth to a childless couple. Every Israelite knew the story of Abraham and Sarah, and how “Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” (Gen. 17:17). Thankfully, God’s ability to fulfill his will is not dependent upon the faith of his people.

And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his seed after him. (v. 19)

Now, a similar message came to Zacharias, and he too would not believe it. “Whereby shall I know this?” he said in Luke 1:18, “for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years.”

And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season. (vv. 19–20)

Zacharias was severely chastised for his unbelief. But was Zacharias expected to believe the message of Gabriel simply because Gabriel was an angel? To the contrary, we are plainly instructed to



test the words of men and angels. Paul said, "Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:8).

When Gabriel said to Zacharias, "Thy prayer is heard," the priest knew exactly what prayer the angel was referring to. Year after year, Zacharias and Elisabeth had petitioned the Lord for a child. But as time went on, Zacharias began to assume that God had denied their request. Their aged faces and whitened hair seemed to be more than enough evidence that the time for children was long past. When God sent his heavenly minister to tell Zacharias that his prayer would be answered, Zacharias thought that God was too late.

It is good to remember that the Lord operates according to his own timetable, and not ours. "My times," says Psalm 31:15, "are in thy hand." His words will be "fulfilled in their season" (Luke 1:20). How much time do you give God to answer your prayers? How soon does your faith start to dwindle? If the Lord's answer to Zacharias and Elisabeth was "No," he surely would have told them. God was happy to give a child to this couple, but he wanted their son born at a certain time.

Sometimes we wonder how long we should continue our supplication before we can safely conclude that the Lord has denied our request. The Gospels teach "that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Luke 18:1). But does this verse imply that we should not faint in prayer until God gives us what we want? God forbid! We cannot pester God into changing his mind! Those who "ask amiss" (James 4:3) often "think that they shall be heard for their much speaking" (Matt. 6:7).

Jesus taught us to pray in a way that does not try to predict or manipulate the Father's will. Regarding every situation of life, this is a perfect prayer: "Thy will be done" (v. 10).

Luke 1:24 tells us that "Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months." Elisabeth wisely determined that she would not say anything to anyone about what had happened. Her husband, as we know, had no choice in the matter.

The next month, Gabriel was sent on another mission, this time to the city of Nazareth. He went to see Elisabeth's young cousin, a girl named Mary, and brought her extraordinary news.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He

shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. (Luke 1:30–33)

Mary was astounded by this message. “How shall this be,” she asked, “seeing I know not a man?” (v. 34). “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee,” explained the angel, “and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” (v. 35).

Zacharias asked, “Whereby shall I know this?” and was chastened for his unbelief. Mary asked, “How shall this be?” and Gabriel kindly answered her question. What was the difference? The questions are identical. Both Mary and Zacharias wondered how something that was physically impossible could come to pass. Did Gabriel simply have more patience with young girls than old men? Of course not! Mary’s question was not born of unbelief, but amazement. She had never prayed to be the mother of the Savior. She may have heard the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 read in the synagogue – “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” – but never in her wildest dreams did she think the prophet was talking about her! Mary was preparing for a much different future. This news was completely unexpected.

More surprises lay in store for Mary when Gabriel told her about Elisabeth’s pregnancy. Remember that Mary knew nothing about her cousin’s condition, because Elisabeth had gone into seclusion. “She hath also conceived a son in her old age,” Gabriel said, “and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:36–37).

And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her. (v. 38)

After Gabriel was gone, Mary was left alone to ponder the things she had been told. Can you imagine the thoughts going through her mind? Her exhilaration quickly turned into fear. What would her parents say? What would her friends say? Most importantly, what would Joseph say? Would anyone believe her?

Mary remembered the angel’s news about Elisabeth, and decided to go see for herself. Verse 39 says she “arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda.” As she crossed the threshold of her cousin’s house, she greeted her with a hearty salutation. “The Lord be with you, Elisabeth.” Before she could say another word, Elisabeth began to prophesy.

And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed *art* thou among women, and blessed *is* the fruit of thy womb. And whence *is* this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed *is* she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. (vv. 42–45)

Step into Mary's shoes and think of the comfort this message brought her! One look at her cousin's silhouette and she knew that the angel had spoken the truth. Elisabeth was indeed with child. Elisabeth confirmed this herself when she said, "The babe leaped in my womb for joy." Mary had not mentioned one word about the angel's visit, and yet Elisabeth was confirming everything the angel said! The double witness of Gabriel and Elisabeth established the Lord's message in an undeniable way.

Now, step into Elisabeth's shoes and consider how strange the words coming out of her own mouth must have sounded to her. She had no understanding of what she was saying. Gabriel had said nothing to Zacharias about Mary. Still, she let the words pour out of her mouth. "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb!" she cried out. If Elisabeth had stopped for even a moment to analyze her words, she might have stumbled in her faith. How could Mary be pregnant? Even more, how could she possibly be the mother of her Lord?

I was teaching a seminar in Cornwall, England. A family from Wales had joined us for the final weekend, which included my teaching on water baptism and the actual baptism service the next morning. The husband had come to Cornwall already knowing he would be baptized. His wife was not so sure, having been taught that water baptism was a ritual whose time had passed. I remember noticing her discomfort as I was teaching.

The meeting finished, and everyone went on to bed. But that night, at about three o'clock in the morning, she woke up her husband. She told him that she could not sleep and that she needed to talk. She still had questions, so many questions. Here is her testimony:

The following morning I was still full of questions when we went to the Church. I was still undecided [about getting baptized] but I decided to get changed "just in case." Our middle son, aged four, had decided that he wanted to be baptized so we went to the changing room together. The words of prophecy over him were

wonderful, and I think it was then that I really decided to “go for it.”

The first words of my prophecy were “Questions, questions, questions. My people have been ministered only questions and not truth. But I am the God of truth. I am the God that gives a certain answer, a sure answer.”

Only someone who had heard the words in our bed chamber could have come up with something so appropriate, something to convince me beyond any doubt that I was doing the right thing, and something to get my attention to listen to the rest of the prophecy. It could only be God. Later on it continued, “Even as thou hast requested of Me that I make unto thee things clear, do I not, the Lord thy God, hear every prayer, and do I not, the Lord thy God, answer every righteous prayer with an answer of peace and surety?” At this point, I knew that I was doing the right thing and that God had heard my prayers.

As for me, I remember that before I finished the first sentence of that prophecy, she began to cry. I opened my eyes and shot a worried glance in her direction. Had I said something wrong? I quickly shut my eyes again and continued to speak. But as I listened to the words coming from my mouth, I too had questions, questions, and questions! Happily, I knew that my part was simply to speak. It did not matter if I did not understand the message, because the message was not for me. It was the Lord’s message to that dear woman of God. Months passed before I learned the answer to the strange prophecy of “questions, questions, questions.” Of course, I was thrilled and astonished.

God needs messengers, not editors! With the gift of tongues, *what* we speak is determined by God, but *that* we speak is up to us. The same is true with the gifts of the interpretation of tongues and prophecy. We speak the words God puts on our lips to speak without editing, or predetermining what we think ought to be said. Our part is simply to deliver the message. So long as we remember this, we are sure to serve him well.

## 20.

### THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

## THE WORD THAT GOD PUTTETH IN MY MOUTH

To God, the passing of time is like a flowing river that he can see at once from beginning to end. He is never surprised, nor held in suspense.

Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure .... (Isaiah 46:10)

What God says is going to happen, will happen, because he has already seen it happen. This is why a true word of prophecy is never wrong, and this is how we can know “the word which the Lord hath not spoken.”

And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that *is* the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:21–22)

There can only be two reasons why a word said to be a “word of the Lord” could fail to come to pass. The most obvious explanation is that it was not a message from God at all. The only other possibility is that the message was altered. The moment we change even one

word of God's message, it becomes our message, and not his. Once changed, that word loses all its power and authority. It is no longer a "sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet. 1:19); now it is only speculation. That is why it is so important that we learn to speak the word he gives us without adding to it or subtracting from it.

Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish *ought* from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.  
(Deuteronomy 4:2)

### TRINITIES. HOLY AND OTHERWISE

Throughout most of Christendom, the word "trinity" is used to describe the special and unique relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Some Christians object to the use of this word because it is not found in the Bible. That argument loses its impact when you realize that the word "Bible" is not found in the Bible either.

A pattern of threes is found throughout the Word of God, in trinities holy and unholy. The three sons of Adam – Cain, Abel, and Seth – populated the antediluvian earth (the world before the flood). The three sons of Noah – Shem, Ham, and Japheth – repopulated the world after the flood. God refers to himself as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" nine times in the Bible (three times three!). Jesus, Moses, and Elijah appeared together in the Transfiguration. Peter, James, and John were the three witnesses of this event. In Revelation 20:10, we see the unholy trinity of the devil, the beast, and the false prophet. In Jude 1:11, there is the trinity of most wicked men:

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. (Jude 1:11)

Cain, Balaam, and Core (or Korah) represent the worst of mankind. "The way of Cain" is the way of the antichrist, and the unrepentant sinner. 1 John 3:12 says that Cain "was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." Korah led the Children of Israel in rebellion against Moses. He typifies those that undermine the authority of God's servants for reason of their own promotion. Such people "despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (2 Pet. 2:10). "The way of

Balaam” typifies those “which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray” for the love of “the wages of unrighteousness” (v. 15). Somewhat surprisingly, there is much we can learn about true prophecy from the biblical testimony of this wicked man, Balaam.

### THE POWER TO BLESS AND CURSE

In the twenty-second chapter of Numbers, Moses was leading the Children of Israel out of Egypt and toward the Promised Land. The mandate of God was brutal and uncompromising. “I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee,” said the Lord in Exodus 23:31. “Thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them” (Deut. 7:2). The pagan nations could either vacate the land or die defending it. Powerful kings tried to oppose the Hebrew invasion, but no one could stop them.

Following their triumph over the Amorites, the children of Israel entered the land called Moab. The king of the Moabites, a man named Balak, knew that unless things soon changed, his name would be added to the growing list of defeated kings. He said to his elders, “Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field” (Num. 22:4). In desperation, he sent messengers to Balaam, a well-known soothsayer, asking him to curse the children of Israel, and thereby guarantee their defeat. In return, he promised a monetary reward.

Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they *are* too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, *that* we may smite them, and *that* I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest *is* blessed, and he whom thou cursest *is* cursed. And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak. (vv. 6–7)

In order to understand the story of Balaam and Balak, three facts must be established. First, Balaam had what the Bible calls “an evil eye.” Proverbs 28:22 says, “He that hasteth to be rich hath an evil eye.” Balaam was obsessed with the acquisition of wealth. Second, Balaam had no moral or ethical objection to cursing the Israelites. He would have been delighted to fulfill the king’s request, and receive the promised reward. Third, Balaam knew that Balak’s estimation of his power was greatly exaggerated. He knew that God alone had the power to bless and curse, as God himself testified.

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known. (Deuteronomy 11:26–28)

Balaam knew better than to promise the king something he could not do. Therefore, he did not immediately agree to the king's request. He said to the king's messengers, "Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me" (Num. 22:8).

One of the many unusual aspects of this story is Balaam's relationship with God. Balaam referred to him as "the LORD my God." He certainly knew how to communicate with the Almighty, and he understood the limits of man's power in comparison. It is helpful to remember that Peter speaks of Balaam as an example of those "which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray" (2 Pet. 2:15). No one can forsake a path he has never traveled. There must have been a time when Balaam walked with God. Peter also refers to "the madness of the prophet" (v. 16). Undoubtedly, it was Balaam's lust to gain the whole world that caused him to lose his soul. Whatever light was once in him had turned to darkness.

But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. (Matthew 6:23–24)

Joshua 13:22 refers to Balaam as a "soothsayer," a practitioner of the evil art of fortunetelling. Micah 5:12 says, "I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers." God's abhorrence of witchcraft did not stop him from using Balaam for his purposes, even as he used the Pharaoh in the days of Moses.

For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. (Romans 9:17)

Balaam sought permission from God to fulfill the king's request, but his request was denied. "Thou shalt not go with them," said the Lord. "Thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed" (Num. 22:12). Balaam sent the king's messengers home, saying, "Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you" (v. 13).



When the news reached Balak, the king assumed Balaam was bargaining for a higher fee. He sent another message, saying, “I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people” (v. 17).

How this new message must have frustrated Balaam! This was his dream come true – he could name his price! You can be sure that if he *could* have cursed the Israelites, he *would* have. If all that was required were for him to repeat some cryptic words from a dusty book of spells, he would have done it before you can say, “Hocus pocus.” But Balaam did not live in a land of make-believe. He knew who *really* set the rules.

And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. (Numbers 22:18)

### THE POWER OF SUPERSTITION

The way of God is very simple. There is a path that he has blessed, and there is a path that he has cursed. Those who walk in the path he has blessed will be blessed. Those who walk in the path he has cursed will be cursed. Every man is without excuse, because he alone is responsible for the choices he makes.

It is precisely for this reason that many people are dissuaded from walking with the Lord. They want an excuse for their failures, someone or something to blame for their condition. They are happier to find an excuse for their situation than they are to learn how to correct it. These are the same people who believe that success is a matter of “good luck.” Successful people are “lucky” people; unsuccessful people are not. Not surprisingly, most people who think this way consider themselves unlucky.

The trouble with “luck” is that it is very whimsical. The strangest thing can either attract it, or drive it away. People who rely on luck do all kinds of things to try to harness good fortune and repel bad fortune. This makes them very superstitious. As Paul realized when he stood on Mars Hill in Greece, all pagan religion is rooted in superstition.

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. (Acts 17:22)

Christians can be just as superstitious as other people are. This is very noticeable in the way some Christians ascribe unrealistic, al-

most *magical* power to the spoken word. Many Christians think that the words they speak have the power to bring certain calamity upon themselves or others.

I was teaching in Mexico, with my wife Nelly serving as my interpreter. One night as we were preparing to return home for the evening, I joked that we had to hurry home before our kids set the house on fire. “Oh, brother!” said one young man, “Do not say things like that! You will cause it to happen!” Sadly, this man preferred superstition to biblical truth, and soon he stopped attending my class.

Even Balaam knew that saying the words was not enough to curse the people of God. Of course he could have said, “I curse the children of Israel.” But he knew his words would have no effect unless they were ordained of God. It is God’s words that have power, and not our own. As Lamentations 3:37 says, “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?”

We need to learn to fear the word of the Lord more than we fear the words of man! Only then will we not live in fear of idle words.

Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others. (Ecclesiastes 7:21–22)

You know that nothing happened to the people you cursed. They were not carried off to damnation just because you told them to go there. Our words do not have that kind of power!

Attributing power to things without power is irrational. Superstitions, like phobias, are irrational fears. The Word of God tells us there is only one reasonable fear – the fear of the Lord.

Say ye not, A confederacy to all *them* to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and *let* him *be* your fear, and *let* him *be* your dread. (Isaiah 8:12–13)

Superstition has more power than the devil himself! Devils must flee at the name of Jesus, but superstitions do not. A minister can cast out devils, but he cannot cast out doctrines of devils. Only sound teaching can root out unsound beliefs. That is why we need the Word of God.

## BALAAM AND HIS ASS

Balaam must have been ecstatic when at last God gave him permission to go with the Moabite king’s messengers. There was only

one provision: “If the men come to call thee,” said the Lord, “rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do” (Num. 22:20). You don’t need to be told that Balaam impatiently awaited their arrival. Can you imagine him pacing the floor of his tent, muttering to himself, *What is taking them so long?* When he could not bear to wait any longer, he took off with his two servants.

“God’s anger was kindled because he went,” says verse 22, and he sent his angel to stop him. But the only one who saw the angel was Balaam’s ass! Verse 23 says that she “saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way.” Balaam must have wondered why he was suddenly riding into the fields! He hit the ass to get her back to the trail.

The path wound through the vineyards, “a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side” (v. 24). With the angel blocking her way, the ass had nowhere to turn. “She thrust herself unto the wall,” says verse 25, “and crushed Balaam’s foot against the wall.” Balaam was really starting to get annoyed, and he hit her again.

Now remember that as far as Balaam could tell, the ass had stopped dead in her tracks for no reason at all. But the ass could see the angel standing directly in front of her, leaving “no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left” (v. 26). She had no desire to be impaled by his sword, so “she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam’s anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff” (v. 27).

Now we come to what I consider the second-most unbelievable verse in the Bible:

And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? (v. 28)

Here, undoubtedly, is the *most* unbelievable verse:

And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. (v. 29)

I once owned a car that was very unreliable. On one of the many occasions it wouldn’t start up, I smacked the dashboard and yelled, “You worthless hunk of metal! I should have you towed to the junkyard!” But if my car had ever talked back to me – *Well, if you’d take better care of me, I’d take better care of you!* – I would not have stayed to argue. I would have run away as far and as fast as I could.

As if it were the most natural thing in the world, Balaam and his ass began to quarrel. “Am not I thine ass,” she said, “upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?” Balaam could not dispute her reasoning. “And he said, Nay.” (v. 30). It was only then that Balaam saw the angel standing there, sword in hand. The angel chastised him, saying, “Unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive” (v. 33). Balaam made a half-hearted apology and the Lord gave him permission to go to the king. “Go with the men,” he said, “but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak” (v. 35).

At last, Balaam met face to face with the king of Moab. Once again, he made it clear that he had no control over the substance of the message brought forth by prophecy. “Have I now any power at all to say any thing?” he asked. “The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak” (v. 38).

God does not ask us to speak on his behalf. He will speak for himself through us. This is the supernatural wonder of the gift of prophecy. By this gift, God gives us the words to speak. When it comes to prophesying, either the words come from him, or we do not speak at all. God does not need a speechwriter. He does not need a co-author, or an editor. God needs faithful messengers!

The next morning, the king took Balaam to one of the high places of Baal. There he built seven altars, and sacrificed on each an oxen and a ram. And there, “the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak” (Num. 23:5). Balaam returned to Balak and there, “he took up his parable” (v. 7).

Balaam did not prophesy to Balak. You will remember that 1 Corinthians 14:22 states that “prophesying serveth not for them that believe not.” God put a word in Balaam’s mouth in the high place, and Balaam delivered that message to the king. But to Balak, it was not a prophecy; it was a parable. It was a message with a hidden meaning. As Jesus said, “Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matt. 13:13). King Balak heard the words with his ears, but not with his understanding. He had no idea that God was going to use his evil desire to curse the Children of Israel as a way to instill the dread of Israel in the heart of all her enemies.

“How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed?” said Balaam. “Or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? (Num. 23:8). For

from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!" (vv. 9–10).

King Balak was horrified! "What hast thou done unto me?" he cried. "I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether" (v. 11). Balaam answered, "Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth?" (v. 12).

The king thought his luck might improve if he moved to a different location. "Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place," he said, "and curse me them from thence" (Num. 23:13). But the word of the Lord from the mouth of Balaam remained the same. "God is not a man that he should lie," he said, "neither the son of man, that he should repent. Hath he said, and shall he not do it? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it" (vv. 19–20).

In order to reverse a command, you must have more power than the one who gave it. As Isaiah said, "For the LORD of hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" (Isa. 14:27). Balaam knew his word was not more powerful than God's word! There is none that is!

He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God *is* with him, and the shout of a king *is* among them. God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. Surely *there is* no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! (Numbers 23:21–23)

It is shameful that God's people are so easily intimidated by the powers of darkness. "There is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel" – not when you stand in the fear of the Lord! Let *him* be your fear, and let *him* be your dread!

You can almost feel sorry for this foolish little king as he pouted and fumed. "Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all," he said (v. 25). But Balaam answered, "Told not I thee, saying, All that the LORD speaketh, that I must do?" (v. 26). Still, the king would not be dissuaded. "Come, I pray thee," he said, "I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence" (v. 27). Even a child could have guessed that

the new location would not change a thing.

God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce *them* through with his arrows. He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed *is* he that blesseth thee, and cursed *is* he that curseth thee. (Numbers 24:8–9)

How can we read these words and remain the same frightened people, worrying about the devil in the same way that other people worry about broken mirrors and black cats? When you stand strong in the Lord in the power of his might, the devil has to worry about *you*. He has no answer for what you have, so long as you walk with God. We need to plead for God's mercy on behalf of anyone so foolish as to even *consider* cursing a child of God.

By now, Balak was out of his mind with anger and fear. "He smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times" (Num. 24:10). But Balaam offered no apology. He reminded the king, "Spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak?" (vv. 12–13).

So how did Balaam earn his notoriety? Balaam recognized that when the people of God walked in obedience to the Lord, no power could overturn the blessing that was upon them. He reasoned that the only way to defeat God's people was to persuade them to defeat themselves. Just as no curse can undo the blessing of God, no blessing can undo his curse. God promised "a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known" (Deut. 11:28). Revelation 2:14 says that Balaam "taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." Balaam persuaded the children of Israel to commit trespass against the Lord and when they did, they sealed their own doom.

We can imagine what Balaam told them: *I know you love the God of Israel. You'd be a fool not to love him; he is the most powerful and most wise, the God of all creation, and you are his chosen people. I'm not trying to turn you away from the Lord. That would be wrong. But*

*you know that he can be pretty difficult sometimes. He just doesn't seem to understand that you and I are not perfect, and so we are going to sin once in a while. Now these little gods, these idols, they don't care about sin. They only want to help. You just hide two or three of these little beauties under your pillow and ask them to send some good luck your way. You know that when we are walking with God, he's right there for us. But when we're not, well, that's when we need something extra. And you and I don't walk with God everyday, do we? Don't worry. This will be our secret.*

Under Balaam's tutelage the Israelites became as worthless as the idols they trusted in.

The idols of the heathen *are* silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not; eyes have they, but they see not; They have ears, but they hear not; neither is there *any* breath in their mouths. They that make them are like unto them: *so is* every one that trusteth in them.

(Psalm 135:15-17)

Balaam recognized that he did not have the power to curse the people of God. "I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD," he said, "to do either good or bad of mine own mind." This is the great lesson of the story of Balaam and Balak. In our continuing study of the gift of prophecy, we need to remember that when we alter the word of the Lord, it becomes our word and not his, with no more power than anything else we say.





## 21.

### *THE GIFT OF PROPHECY*

## THUS SAITH THE HOLY GHOST

Throughout the Bible, there are numerous examples of the gift of prophecy being used to bring a special message from the Lord to a certain individual or group. This message is called a “charge” or a “blessing.” As Proverbs 10:22 says, “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.”

### DO AS OCCASION SERVE THEE

A genuine word of prophecy is the ultimate example of a “word fitly spoken.” It is the right word, at the right time, for the right person. But like all the wonderful things of God, prophecy can be grossly misrepresented. I am very wary of people who continually have a “prophetic word” for someone in the congregation. I am equally cautious of those who are always seeking such a word from others. Almost invariably, there is something out of balance in both the people and the supposed message. Some things are better suited for a fortune-teller’s tent than the Church of God.

We must learn to serve God within the confines of his anointing, and within the restrictions of his guidance. Only then are we free to “do as occasion serve thee.”

And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt

prophecy with them, and shalt be turned into another man. And let it be, when these signs are come unto thee, *that* thou do as occasion serve thee; for God *is* with thee. (1 Samuel 10:6–7)

A word from the Lord is a special word for a special occasion. In many denominations, it is customary for Christian parents to consecrate their children to the Lord. Special prayers are said for the child, and for his parents. A prophetic word spoken at this time will help the parents to “train up a child in the way he should go” (Prov. 22:6), in “the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). A word from the Lord is also a very appropriate part of a water baptism service, or a wedding.

Another opportune occasion for a word from the Lord is at the public ordination of elders. We read in Numbers 27:22 that Moses “took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation.” There, he “laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses” (v. 23). Paul wrote of a prophetic charge spoken at the ordination of Timothy. “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy,” he said, “according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18). As we will see, Paul well understood how a word from the Lord is needful to “war a good warfare.”

### PAUL, THE MODEL CHRISTIAN

On the evening of the Last Supper, Jesus washed the feet of each of his twelve disciples. By this gracious act, Jesus demonstrated the kind of humble servanthood that he requires of his disciples.

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. (John 13:13–15)

By example Jesus taught what it truly means to walk in the fullness of the great commandment; to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind; and to love our neighbor as ourselves. He demonstrated the perfection we are to press after, the “mark for the prize of the high calling of God” (Phil. 3:14).

Jesus was “in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15). Being *without sin* makes Jesus quite different from you or me. He is the *model* of perfection. Though we strive towards it, we will never attain the sinless perfection of Christ in this life. That is why the example of Paul is so precious to all Christians. Paul is the model

of the *pursuit* of Christian perfection. Like you and me, Paul was a sinner. He called himself “chief” of all sinners.

This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting. (1 Timothy 1:15–16)

Paul was a sinner saved by grace. He had to learn to accept God’s mercy and forgiveness. He had to learn to “put off the old man” and “put on the new.” Paul struggled against sin, flesh, and the devil, and most often, he won. That is why he could say to the church, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). That is why he could say, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you” (Phil. 4:9).

#### PAUL’S MISSION TO JERUSALEM

One reason why Paul was so successful in his ministry is because he knew what God required of him. By the Spirit he stayed in communication with God. From the outset of his Christian service he learned the importance of the prophetic word of the Lord.

As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid *their* hands on them, they sent *them* away. So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. (Acts 13:2–4)

Wherever the Bible says, “The Holy Ghost said,” or “Thus saith the Holy Ghost,” we can expect to see evidence of inspired utterance, a word from the Lord spoken by the mouth of his servants. Here, elders laid hands upon Paul and Barnabas in ordination, and by way of the gift of prophecy, they gave voice to the Spirit of God. Paul and Barnabas knew it was not people who had commissioned their journey. They were “sent forth by the Holy Ghost.”

The day came when the Lord sent Paul on a mission to Jerusalem. When the Lord sends out his servants, he does not send them alone; he goes with them. Mark 16:20 says, “They went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.” God was with Paul, working with him, confirming the word that he had spoken to him. The Holy Ghost bore

witness to Paul by communicating to his inner man, and through the prophetic messages of others.

Along the way, his traveling party stopped in Ephesus for a meeting with certain church elders. Paul told them that he was going to Jerusalem “bound in the spirit.” He knew it would be a dangerous journey. He knew it would not be a pleasant experience. But most important, he knew that he was supposed to go.

And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. (Acts 20:22–23)

Long before Paul reached his destination, the Lord let him know the price he would have to pay in order to fulfill his mission. “Bonds and afflictions” awaited him in Jerusalem. Paul counted the cost, and determined that he would not allow even the fear of death to deter him from completing his assignment.

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. (v. 24)

In the final days of my preparation for ministry, the man of God who was unto me as a “father in the Word” gave me a prophetic charge. “God has made you what he has need of: teachers; a teacher who will not be afraid to go into the dark holes, and into the rough places.” To this day, when I read these words I know that God sees me as much braver than I see myself. I know there are still many things about this life that I hold very dear. Paul’s example continues to be very intimidating to me. Still, I am grateful that he has given us a model to which we can aspire. He not only finished his race, but he showed us what it would cost to follow in his footsteps.

From Ephesus, Paul set sail for the long voyage over the Mediterranean Sea. But when he arrived in Tyre, a port town in Phoenicia, his plans suddenly changed.

And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:4)

Again we see the gifts of the Spirit in operation. “Through the Spirit” Paul was advised to remain in Tyre for a few days before continuing his journey. A lesser man might have argued, insisting that he keep his predetermined schedule. But Paul knew better than to run

ahead of the will of God. He had learned the importance of waiting on the Lord. I am sure that Paul spent time in prayer, asking God to confirm the message given by these disciples. Having received his answer, Paul determined to stay in Tyre as long as God required.

What was the reason for this delay? The Bible is quiet on the subject, but one can reasonably speculate. Perhaps it was a matter of a life-threatening storm on the sea, or a band of robbers lying in wait for the travelers. Paul had experienced these kinds of troubles before. Just as likely, there may have been a band of Jews plotting to assassinate him.

Ever since his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul had been a marked man. The persecution against Christians did not end when he was converted. Overnight, he went from being the hunter to the prey. In the eyes of the synagogue leaders, Jesus was just a troublesome outsider. His disciples were unsophisticated Galilaeans. But Paul had been part of the elite class of Pharisees. He was one of them! They thought of him as the worst kind of traitor. They could not wait to bury him.

Whatever the reason, Paul and his companions remained in Tyre for seven days. Acts 21:5 says, "And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way." They were now free to continue their travels. They resumed their journey toward Jerusalem and came to Caesarea, where they were guests in the home of Philip the evangelist. Again they heard from the Lord, for "the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy" (v. 9).

Here in Caesarea, the travelers again postponed their departure. Was this the message given by the daughters of Philip, that they should tarry in Caesarea? That could well be true, because within a few days, a man coming from Judaea met them in Caesarea with a message from God.

And as we tarried *there* many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles. (vv. 10–11)

If Paul had already left Caesarea, Agabus would not have been able to give him this message. How fantastic is our God to orchestrate events to our good and his glory!

Much can be learned from this account. First, Paul was not look-

ing for Agabus; Agabus was looking for him. Paul was not knocking on doors, taking opinion polls on what he should do next. He waited on the Lord, expecting confirmation from above. Second, how could Agabus know where to find Paul, except that God had told him? Imagine the comfort this was to Paul, a reminder that the God in heaven knew exactly where to find him. Finally, Agabus came to Paul not knowing that Paul had been “bound in the spirit,” or that others had prophesied concerning the troubles awaiting him in Jerusalem. Agabus came to deliver the message God had given him to deliver. Agabus did not know that this message would confirm what Paul already knew in his spirit. His prophetic message, brought forth by the gifts of the Spirit, was unto Paul’s edification, exhortation, and comfort.

The message was not pleasant, but it was very reassuring. Paul now knew with absolute certainty that he was on the right track. Agabus never told Paul to change his course; he let him know what was awaiting him upon his arrival. Furthermore, Paul could find courage in knowing that he would be afflicted, but not martyred, in Jerusalem.

And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. (vv. 12–13)

The people loved Paul. They did not want to see him hurt again, and so they begged him to stay in Caesarea. Surely he could find a safer way to serve the Lord! But Paul knew he had a job to do. It was not that he had a death wish, but there was something more important to him than this mortal life. Early in their years of ministry, he and Barnabus were commended by their peers as “men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). This held true for Paul throughout his life.

Of the Jews five times received I forty *stripes* save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; *In* journeyings often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils by *mine own* countrymen, *in* perils by the heathen, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; *In* weariness and painfulness, *in* watchings often, *in* hunger and thirst, *in* fastings often, *in* cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:24–28)

If there ever was anyone with justifiable reason to quit preaching

the Gospel, that person was Paul. Most of us have thought about quitting for far less. But Paul never chose the road of ease over the highway of the King.

And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. (Acts 21:14)

Here it is, that most perfect of prayers. Here is perfect submission to the sovereign God, said in faith that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). With this prayer, you confess that you “trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Prov. 3:5). With this prayer, you relinquish all fear, “casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. (Acts 21:15)

Paul finally made it to Jerusalem, and just as he had been warned, there was trouble awaiting him. When “the Jews which were of Asia” (v. 27) saw him in the temple, they grabbed him, crying out, “Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place” (v. 28).

You and I have the luxury of judging these events from a historical perspective. It is easy to cast all the Jews into the role of villains. For a truth, many of the Jews were provoked to wrath toward Paul by envy, the most base of emotions.

But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. (Acts 13:45)

But others sincerely believed that Paul was teaching things that were subversive to the truth. They believed that he belonged in that category of teachers “whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not” (Titus 1:11).

If you heard a Christian pastor teaching that Jesus is not the only Savior, you would want to shut his mouth, yes? You must realize how radical it was for Paul to teach that *Gentiles* could fully share in God’s covenants with Israel. Telling a devout Jew that being born of Jacob’s seed was no longer essential to God’s plan of salvation was like telling a Christian that Jesus is only one of many Saviors. Even Peter could hardly believe that the door of salvation had opened to the Gentiles, even after he had seen a heavenly vision!

Whatever passion had first been stirred, the people of Jerusalem

were now just a riotous mob.

And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded *him* to be bound with two chains and demanded who he was, and what he had done. (Acts 21:30–33)

If not for the arrival of the soldiers, the crowd would have killed Paul. The Lord knew to send soldiers to protect Paul, even as he knew that Paul would be bound with *two* chains. Remember that Agabus had prophesied that Paul would be bound in hand and foot.

And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. (vv. 34–35)

Paul was so badly beaten that the soldiers had to carry him up the stairs to the castle. Yet Paul was determined that no opportunity to preach the Gospel pass him by. With the captain's permission, "Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying, Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you" (Acts 21:40 to 22:1).

Paul told the Jews of his own Jewish heritage and education, and that it was he who had led the persecution against the Christians. He testified of being blinded by the light of Jesus on the way to Damascus, and how a man named Ananias restored his sight, and baptized him. He spoke of hearing from God that the Jews would not receive his testimony, and that he was being sent to the Gentiles. Paul poured out his heart and soul to the Israelites, his "kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:3). Imagine how his heart was broken by their response.

And they gave him audience unto this word, and *then* lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a *fellow* from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. (Acts 22:22)

Paul was spared from further beating when the chief captain learned that he was a Roman citizen, and had been illegally arrested.



The terrified captain removed his shackles, and “commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them” (Acts 22:30).

Paul again gave his testimony, igniting such a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees that “the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle” (Acts 23:10).

Paul was brought back to the castle, but this time it was for his own protection. Then, in the night, Jesus appeared to him in a vision, standing by him with a message of comfort and further instruction.

And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. (Acts 23:11)

Paul had been alone in his room, still bloody and bruised from the beatings he had received. No matter how he shifted his body, he could not find a pain-free position. But the moment the Lord appeared to him, all the pain melted away. The Lord came to Paul to congratulate him on a job well done. Only someone who wants to please God as much as Paul did can appreciate what this meant to him.

There is a truism that says the reward of good work is more work. This certainly is true in the work of the ministry. Jesus knew he could trust Paul to be faithful in Rome, because he had just proven himself so faithful in Jerusalem.

In Galatians 2:1–2, Paul wrote that he “went up again to Jerusalem.... And I went up by revelation ... lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.” What was true of that trip was true of this one as well. Paul went to Jerusalem by the will of God. He did not run in vain.

Paul was never imprisoned by the will of man, or because he had disobeyed God’s guidance. As he wrote in his letters to the Ephesians, to Timothy, and to Philemon, Paul was a “prisoner of Jesus Christ.” All the things that happened to him were “unto the furtherance of the gospel” (Phil. 1:12). Under the watchful eye of the prison guards, Paul could rest, he could pray, and he could write. It was while he was in prison that Paul wrote many of the wonderful epistles that comprise so much of the New Testament. God knew what he was doing, and he guided Paul through his journey step by step by means of this wonderful gift of prophecy, the same gift you and I can use today.

COVET TO PROPHECY

As we come to an end of our study of the gift of prophecy, I would like to remind you that there are many things in the Scriptures that we are emphatically told not to covet. Exodus 20:17 commands, “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour’s.” Jesus himself said, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15).

There is, however, one thing that we *should* covet. 1 Corinthians 14:39 tells us, “Brethren, covet to prophesy.”

We would do well to cherish this wonderful gift.

PART THREE

THE REVELATION GIFTS  
OF THE SPIRIT



## 22.

### INTRODUCTION TO THE REVELATION GIFTS

## GOD HATH REVEALED THEM UNTO US BY HIS SPIRIT

Throughout our Christian experience – from the moment of our spiritual birth, until that glorious day when we shall know the Lord even as he knows us – it is God’s desire to bring us increasingly into the knowledge of his will. Paul’s prayer for the church at Colosse makes plain God’s yearning for all his people.

For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ... (Colossians 1:9–10)

The paths of our spiritual education are as varied as the lessons we learn. It is the Lord’s prerogative to teach his children in the way that best suits his purpose. “What man is he that feareth the Lord?” says Psalm 25:12. “Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.”

Some truths are best taught through a series of structured lessons. Each lesson is designed for consideration both individually and collectively. Precept upon precept, each new idea is founded upon those previously stated and provides a stepping stone to the next.

There are some lessons that are best learned by experience. Consider the story of Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban. After years of working for Laban, Jacob was ready to start his own life. He said to his father-in-law, "Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go" (Gen. 30:26). Laban did not want him to go, because he knew he had benefited from God's blessing on Jacob. "I pray thee," he said, "if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake" (v. 27).

Not every experience is pleasant, but in every experience there is something to be learned. In Psalm 119:71 we read, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." Verse 67 explains, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." We pray to God to change our circumstances, but he uses our circumstances to change us!

As Job 14:1 testifies, "Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble." No one gets through life unscathed by problems. But through experience we learn that life's troubles, no matter how severe they seem at the time, are only temporary. They are like the summer rainstorms that come and go.

I will never forget the time I was teaching this very lesson in a church just outside the city limits of Kampala in Uganda, East Africa. Like so many of the buildings there, the church was roofed in sheet metal. When an afternoon downpour let loose upon us, the sound of rain hitting the metal was as loud as a thousand steel drums. Even though my voice was amplified, I could barely hear myself. Then, just as I was finishing the lesson, the clouds passed away and the sun began to shine, providing the perfect illustration to what I was teaching. Our troubles do not last forever. They come and go.

To find strength in times of trouble, we do good to remember the difference between things that are eternal and things that are temporal. In the eyes of God, mortal life is "as a shadow that passeth away" (Ps. 144:4). The struggles of today are simply "our light affliction, which is but for a moment" (2 Cor. 4:17). That is why we must learn to "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (v. 18).

So long as we seek him, we will find that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). Those who seek God's help will not grow faint in their day of adversity. Then, after

the storm has passed, they will be fortified by their remembrance of God's deliverance.

Remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. My soul hath *them* still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. (Lamentations 3:19–21)

The tribulations we endure culminate in renewed hope. Therefore, as Romans 5:3–4 says, “We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope.”

Another way we learn is through deduction. We weigh the facts, and reach a logical conclusion. For example, when we consider the sacrifice that Christ made for us, the service he asks of us in return seems only right. To see this vividly, combine John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16 into one thought:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. Hereby perceive we the love *of God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. (John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16)

In this light, any personal sacrifice that is required to serve the Lord is quite “reasonable.”

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service. (Romans 12:1)

Perhaps God's favorite way to teach his children is by example. The benefits of God are exemplified in the lives of the people that obey him. The severity of God is shown in the lives of those who withstand him. We can learn from both examples.

Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off. (Romans 11:22)

Many people would like to have more patience in their life; fewer are willing to travel the road by which patience is obtained. The prophets of old have left us an example of what it means to live in godly patience.

Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have

heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. (James 5:10–11)

Paul warned the church that “unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil. 1:29). By the example of Jesus, we learn how to suffer graciously.

For this *is* thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory *is it*, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer *for it*, ye take it patiently, this *is* acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps .... (1 Peter 2:19–21)

I once heard a pastor tell his congregation that he wanted God to give him great material abundance so that by his riches others would be inspired to serve the Lord. Unfortunately, worldly wealth more often inspires jealousy than it does godliness. If you want your life to be an inspiration to others, emulate people like those honored in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews; people “of whom the world was not worthy” (Heb. 11:38). They kept their faith even in the face of severe hardships. This was the kind of example left by the early church that continues to inspire true believers today.

And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. (1 Thessalonians 1:6–7)

Learning from the experiences of those who went before us is essential to our spiritual development. These are the lessons that build our Christian character, and teach us the value of patience, comfort, and hope.

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

These examples point to a higher way of life. Other examples are a warning to those who would reject Christ. The sudden calamity that befell the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah is an example of the terrible judgment that awaits those who reject the Lord.

Even as Sodom and Gomorrhah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. (Jude 1:7)



In learning the things of God, there is no replacement for reading the Scriptures. In the days when mortal men sat on the throne of Israel, each monarch was expected to write out a copy of the book of the Law. This ensured, of course, that he *read* the Law.

And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of *that which is* before the priests the Levites: And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them .... (Deuteronomy 17:18–19)

Paul’s word to Timothy could well be the Lord’s word to us. “Till I come,” he said, “give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine” (1 Tim. 4:13). On Paul’s first missionary trip to Europe he and Silas noted that the Jews of Berea were “more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

The problem with books of religious instruction such as In the Power of His Might is that, in order to clarify his point, an author will include only those Scriptures or Scripture portions that support his argument. The only reason someone would write a religious book is to promote his personal theology. Therefore, such books should be read with a certain amount of caution. Even though books of religious instruction may contain numerous Scripture references, they are not a substitute for the Bible. Search the Scriptures for yourself and discover whether such things are so.

I make it a practice to read the Bible with an eye to those verses that seem to contradict my religious beliefs. If I cannot resolve the contradiction, then my theology must be called into question. At the same time, I know there are many more verses of Scripture that I could have included in this book to support the ideas I am presenting. To keep this book relatively short, I have tried to limit myself to only two or three witnesses for each truth.

Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ ... (Ephesians 3:4)

## THE REVEALED WORD OF GOD

Whether it is acquired by structured lessons, by experience, by logical deduction, by example, or by reading the Bible, all spiritual knowledge is a secret thing until it is revealed by God. “The secret

things belong unto the LORD our God,” says Deuteronomy 29:29, “but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

1 John 3:20 teaches us that God “knoweth all things.” He who knows all things reveals part of what he knows to the children of men. Simply stated, a revelation is an uncovering of a secret, something that was previously hidden.

At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. (Matthew 11:25)

From the story of Samuel and Eli we learn that it is God who initiates contact with those he has foreordained to serve him. Samuel was just a young boy when his mother sent him to live with the prophet Eli. One night as Samuel lay in bed, the Lord called him by name. Samuel thought he heard the voice of Eli and ran to the prophet’s room.

And he ran unto Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And he went and lay down. And the LORD called yet again, Samuel. And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here *am* I; for thou didst call me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. (1 Samuel 3:5–6)

Samuel did not realize that he had heard the voice of God calling him. As verse 7 tells us, “Samuel did not yet know the LORD, neither was the word of the LORD yet revealed unto him.” Once God revealed himself to Samuel, Samuel began to learn and grow.

You cannot know God until the word of the Lord has been revealed to you. Jesus said, “No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him” (Matt. 11:27). It is only through revelation that you can become acquainted with him. He is no longer a character in a book; he reveals himself as one who is very real. That is why Job said at the time of his awakening, “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee” (Job 42:5).

### TO CONFOUND THE WISE

The great flood of Noah’s day foreshadowed the day when the world will be cleansed of wickedness forevermore, when God creates new heavens and a new earth. The cleansing in Noah’s day was pathetically short-lived. As the population of the earth grew, so

did its wickedness. At the time, all people were “of one language, and of one speech” (Gen. 11:1). In their evil imagination they joined together to build “a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven” (v. 4). But God was not in favor of this plan, and he determined to stop them.

And the LORD said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another’s speech. (Genesis 11:6–7)

In the twinkling of an eye, conversation came to an end. People could not understand each other. Words made perfect sense to the man speaking, but they had no meaning to anyone else. God *confounded* the language when he turned speech into babble.

Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth. (v. 9)

God so thoroughly confounded the language that even today, people of differing nations still need interpreters to understand each other. Yet God did more than confound language; he has also confounded wisdom. 1 Corinthians 1:27 tells us that “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.” In a show of contempt for “the wisdom of the wise,” God deliberately shrouded his Word behind a cloak of foolishness.

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. (1 Corinthians 1:18–19)

To the unenlightened man, the Word of God is as confounded as the language was in Babel. Even though he understands the individual words on the page, he cannot make sense of what he reads. Each verse seems to contradict the next. But rather than lament his state of spiritual blindness, the unenlightened man claims to be the only one who truly *can* see. He disdains God, and ridicules those who believe. The things of the Spirit of God “are foolishness unto him,” says 1 Corinthians 2:14, “neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” As Romans 1:22 testifies, by “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.”

Like a man longing to touch the stars shining high above his head, mortal man cannot reach high enough to grasp the knowledge of God. The Psalmist said, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it" (Ps. 139:6). We cannot reach up to God. He must reach down to us. Just as he did for Samuel, God *reveals* his Word to us by his Spirit.

But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.  
(1 Corinthians 2:10)

God's promise in Proverbs 1:23 is as true today as the day he voiced it: "Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you." All you have ever learned of God came by his revealing it to you. You learned that you were a sinner by revelation. You learned that Jesus Christ was the Savior from sin by revelation. If you are a Christian, receiving revelation from God is nothing new to you, whether you realize it or not.

As we begin to study the three revelation gifts of the Spirit, let us remember that like all the spiritual gifts, these gifts are supernatural abilities. The three revelation gifts equip you to receive three different kinds of revelation. A word of knowledge is a revelation of an unsearchable fact, such as a future event. A word of wisdom is a revelation of guidance or counsel. A revelation of the discerning of spirits is a revelation concerning the source of any spiritual manifestation. It is by the revelation gifts that God opens the eyes and ears of the church. As Jesus said, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear" (Matt. 13:16).

## 23.

### *THE GIFT OF THE WORD OF KNOWLEDGE*

### A MAN IN WHOM THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS

In the Garden of Eden, God told Adam, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat” (Gen. 2:16). Only one tree was forbidden to Adam and Eve, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God forewarned that “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (v. 17). But Satan convinced Eve that God had a selfish reason for denying them that fruit. “For God doth know,” Satan lied, “that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5). It is rather puzzling that the thought of “knowing good and evil” would appeal to her. Up to the time of the transgression, all that their eyes could see was not just good, but *very* good.

And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good .... (Genesis 1:31a)

Ironically, after Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree, they *were* enlightened. “And the eyes of them both were opened,” says Genesis 3:7, “and they knew that they were naked.” In his own way, Satan kept his word to them. For the first time Adam and Eve had knowledge of that which was evil.

Like the trees of Eden, there are some things that God has freely given and others that he has forbidden. It is by the Spirit of God that

we can know “the things that are freely given to us of God.”

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. (1 Corinthians 2:12)

As we study the revelation gifts of the Spirit, it is good to remember that the forbidden fruit of Genesis was forbidden knowledge. The revelation gifts of the Spirit are not given that we can randomly uncover the secret things of life. Once again, “the secret things belong unto the LORD our God” (Deut. 29:29). God reveals knowledge to fulfill his purposes, not to satisfy our idle curiosities. The revelation gifts of the Spirit are given that we may know the things that God wants us to know.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, (Ephesians 1:17–18)

The gift of the word of knowledge is the ability God gives whereby you can receive from God a revelation of an unsearchable fact, something that you must know in order to complete your appointed task. The fruit of this gift is not *all* knowledge, but a *word* of knowledge, a piece of information that you could not discover on your own. An example of an unsearchable fact is specific knowledge of the future. James 4:14 says, “Ye know not what shall be on the morrow.” For the most part, knowledge of the future is a secret that belongs to God. Except for those things that God has revealed, knowledge of the future is forbidden knowledge. It is no coincidence that many people are lured into the satanic arts by fortunetellers.

The gift of the word of knowledge enables believers to receive from God the secrets he has decided to reveal. This gift does not work at your own initiative. You cannot determine to receive a revelation about this person or that event. God alone holds the key to revelation knowledge. What he wants you to know, he will tell you.

### JOSEPH AND THE PHARAOH'S DREAMS

Much can be learned about the gift of the word of knowledge from the story of Joseph, the son of Jacob. This account begins in Genesis 37 and continues through chapter 50. The story of Joseph bridges the books of Genesis and Exodus by explaining how the Children of Israel came to dwell in the land of Egypt.

Jacob (also known as “Israel”) had twelve sons, born of four different women: sisters Leah and Rachel, and their respective handmaids, Zilpah and Bilhah. Joseph, the eleventh born, was the son most beloved by his father. This fact did not escape his brothers, and “when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him” (Gen. 37:4).

In truth, Joseph was special among his brethren. He was just a boy when, through a series of revelatory dreams, God began to show him his extraordinary plans for his life. By a word of knowledge, Joseph saw himself standing over his brothers as they bowed in obedience before him. When he told his brothers about this dream, they were predictably outraged.

And his brethren said to him, Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? And they hated him yet the more for his dreams, and for his words. (v. 8)

Their dark feelings toward Joseph worsened even more after he told them of a second dream in which not only his brothers, but also his parents, bowed down before him. Even his father rebuked him when he heard of it, saying, “What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” (v. 10).

The jealousy of Joseph’s brothers grew into murderous conspiracy. They plotted to kill him and throw his dead body in a pit. “We will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him,” they agreed, “and we shall see what will become of his dreams” (v. 20). Brother Reuben had a change of heart, and convinced the others to throw Joseph alive into the pit, in the hope that he might later rescue him. But when brother Judah noticed a caravan of Ishmeelites on their way to Egypt, he devised a new plan.

And Judah said unto his brethren, What profit *is it* if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he *is* our brother *and* our flesh. And his brethren were content. (vv. 26–27)

The Ishmeelites sold Joseph to an officer of the Pharaoh named Potiphar. Joseph prospered in his master’s house, for “the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house for Joseph’s sake; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field” (Gen. 39:5). But when Potiphar’s wife grew tired of having her carnal advances refused by Joseph, she made a false accusation against

him, and Joseph was arrested.

Joseph was put into a prison “where the king’s prisoners were bound” (Gen. 39:20). Even so the Lord was with Joseph, and gave him favor in the sight of the prison keeper. Before too long, Joseph was in charge of all the prisoners in his ward.

One day the Pharaoh’s chief baker and chief butler were both arrested and sent to prison, and they too were placed under Joseph’s care. There “they continued a season in ward” (Gen. 40:4). Then one morning, Joseph asked them why they both looked so sad.

And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and *there is* no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, *Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you.* (v. 8)

Joseph spoke a remarkable truth. Interpretations are one of the “secret things” that belong to God, something only he can reveal. The gift of the word of knowledge does not make you an interpreter of dreams. The gift itself does not produce revelations. By this gift, you can receive a revelation from God, should God desire you to receive it. In this way, the spiritual gifts can be likened to a telephone. A telephone is quite useless unless it is connected to a network. Even with the gifts of the Spirit, without God, you can do nothing.

After the butler told Joseph his dream, Joseph told him its interpretation. There was good news for him – in three days he would be restored to his former position. Knowing that this man would soon be released from prison, Joseph asked a favor of him. “Make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house,” he asked. “For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon” (vv. 14–15).

Hearing the good news, the chief baker anxiously awaited the interpretation of his own dream. But a very different answer awaited him. He would be hanged for his crime. Three days later, these two dreams were fulfilled exactly as Joseph had foretold, “Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him” (v. 23).

Two more years passed with Joseph still in prison. Then one night, the Pharaoh dreamed two very strange dreams. Not one of his counselors was able to discern the meaning. At last, the chief butler remembered Joseph, and he was brought before the Pharaoh.

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, I have dreamed a dream, and *there is* none that can interpret it: and I have heard say of



thee, *that* thou canst understand a dream to interpret it.  
(Genesis 41:15)

For a moment, put yourself in Joseph's shoes. What a golden opportunity had presented itself! If he could persuade the Pharaoh that he had a special gift for the interpretation of dreams, he could barter for his release from prison. Maybe he could even get a position of authority in Pharaoh's court. Then he could use his influence to avenge himself on his brothers and on Potiphar's wife as well, not to mention the chief butler who had forgotten him for these two long years. He could make them all wish they had never been born! Yet, in this moment of truth, Joseph showed his remarkable integrity.

And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, *It is* not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace. (v. 16)

Joseph gave the glory to God. He knew it was not by his ability, but by God's ability in him that he was able to learn such unsearchable things. He forsook any schemes he might have entertained, and entrusted his future to God. A true servant of the Lord does not lean upon his own devices. As Proverbs 18:16 declares, "A man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men."

Joseph told the Pharaoh the meaning of his dreams, an unsearchable secret he had received from God by the gift of the word of knowledge. It was by revelation that Joseph knew that God would make known to him the interpretation of the Pharaoh's dreams. By revelation, he knew that the message would be peaceful, and easy to be entreated. Joseph told the Pharaoh that his two dreams had one interpretation, and that they illustrated future events that would shortly begin to unfold: seven years of great plenty followed by seven years of terrible famine. Finally, Joseph told the Pharaoh that the reason he had two dreams was "because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass" (Gen. 41:32).

The Pharaoh marveled, and said to his servants, "Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?" (Gen. 41:38). Then he said to Joseph, "Forasmuch as God hath shewed thee all this, there is none so discreet and wise as thou art" (v. 39). He made Joseph the governor of Egypt, second in command only to the Pharaoh himself.

Throughout the seven years of plenty, Joseph ensured that a portion of the harvest was set aside in the storehouses. Because of this, there was surplus food in Egypt even in the years of famine. People from countries near and far came to buy corn from Joseph. Two years

into the famine, Joseph's brothers came from Canaan as well.

And Joseph *was* the governor over the land, *and he it was* that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him *with* their faces to the earth. (Genesis 42:6)

Verse 9 says, "And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them." The vision Joseph had seen when he was just a boy in his father's house had come to pass. Even so, his brothers did not know that it was Joseph who was standing over them. Joseph did not make himself known to them immediately. In fact, he treated them roughly, imprisoning them three days as spies. During this time, Joseph overheard his brothers talking. Clearly, they were still tormented by guilt over their crime against their brother. They could still hear the sound of his voice crying out to them as he wrestled with the slave traders before they bound him and carried him away. This imprisonment, they assumed, was divine retribution.

And they said one to another, We *are* verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? therefore, behold, also his blood is required. (vv. 21-22)

Finally, the day came when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I *am* Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt. (Genesis 45:4)

Imagine how quickly their shock turned into stark terror! Certainly Joseph's day of vengeance had come. But Joseph chased away their fears with words of great comfort.

Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life. For these two years *hath* the famine *been* in the land: and yet *there are* five years, in the which *there shall* neither be earing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. (vv. 5-7)

Hundreds of years later, Paul wrote in his letter to the Christians at Rome, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). As Joseph, Prime Minister of the most powerful nation

on earth, stood before his brothers, he knew that only God Almighty could have orchestrated such incredible circumstances to bring this glorious outcome to pass.

So now *it was* not you *that* sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt. (Genesis 45:8)

Incidentally, what if the chief butler *had* remembered Joseph, and he had been released from prison two years earlier? Where would Joseph have been when the Pharaoh had his dream? Certainly not in Egypt! Joseph would have long since returned to the land of his people. But God Almighty had ordained that, at a time appointed, Joseph would be in Egypt to give Pharaoh his answer, and to shepherd God's people through a terrible natural disaster. By way of a supernatural gift from God – the gift of the word of knowledge – Joseph received revelations concerning these things. And as we now know, this act of faith changed the course of history not only for Egypt, but for the whole world as well.



## 24.

### *THE GIFT OF THE WORD OF KNOWLEDGE*

## THERE IS A GOD IN HEAVEN THAT REVEALETH SECRETS

Hundreds of years after the death of Joseph, another Hebrew boy was also carried away to a foreign land and called upon to interpret the dreams of a pagan king. This time, the foreign land was Babylon, the king was Nebuchadnezzar, and the young boy was named Daniel. Daniel was among the first group of captives taken by the armies of Babylon when they invaded the land of Judah.

By order of the king, a handful of Hebrew boys were separated out for indoctrination in the ways of Babylon. Those selected were born of royal blood, the princes of Israel. They were strong in mind and body, and superbly educated, “skilful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science” (Dan. 1:4). These young men had once embodied the future of Israel. Now it seemed they would personify her ruin.

For three years these young men were immersed in “the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans” (Dan. 1:4). Even their names were changed. The Babylonians intended to strip them of all reminders of their Hebrew identity in order to assimilate them into their society. But just as he had done for Joseph in the land of the Pharaoh, God showered his grace upon Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the four children of Judah.

As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. (Daniel 1:17)

These four boys excelled amongst their peers in the Babylonian court.

And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. And in all matters of wisdom *and* understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians *and* astrologers that *were* in all his realm. (vv. 19–20)

The day came when a strange dream roused Nebuchadnezzar from his sleep. Deeply troubled, he called upon the wise men of Babylon to interpret the vision for him.

Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to shew the king his dreams. So they came and stood before the king. (Daniel 2:2)

“Tell thy servants the dream,” they said, “and we will shew the interpretation” (v. 4). But like a puff of smoke, the dream had vanished from the king’s mind. “The thing is gone from me,” he said (v. 5a). Not only would they have to tell him the interpretation, but also the dream itself.

Nebuchadnezzar promised a great reward to the man who could tell him his dream and its meaning. However, the king’s counselors lost all their excitement for the prize once they learned the penalty for failure. “But if ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof,” warned the king, “ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill” (v. 5b). After all, the only reason that the king kept soothsayers on his payroll was to uncover secrets like these. If they truly had the abilities they claimed, revealing the king’s dream would be no more difficult than interpreting it.

The wise men of Babylon knew they were in deep trouble. Like all spiritualists, they had made it a practice to be purposefully vague in their readings, leaving room to explain when things did not turn out according to their predictions. Until now, it had been impossible for Nebuchadnezzar to prove or disprove the authenticity of their “revelations.” Now he would know if they were telling the truth about his dream. The truth would rekindle his memory. If there were no inner witness in his heart, he would know that they had spoken “lying and

corrupt words” (v. 9). In order to stay alive, they needed to convince the king that his expectation was unreasonable. “There is none other that can shew it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh,” they protested (v. 11).

For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise *men* of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise *men* should be slain; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain. (vv. 12–13)

The wise men of Babylon hid in fear for their lives. Only Daniel was not afraid. He confidently promised the king that if he be given some time, “he would shew the king the interpretation” (v. 16). With Nebuchadnezzar’s permission, Daniel returned to his house and agreed with his Judean companions “that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret” (v. 18).

What was the basis of Daniel’s confidence? How did he know that God would give him the answer he needed? We read previously that because of the special grace upon his life, “Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (Dan. 1:17). But Daniel’s confidence was based on more than previous experience. He knew God would give him the understanding of this *particular* dream and its meaning. This was in itself a revelation, a word of knowledge.

The special anointing on Daniel’s life did not obligate God to give him a revelation. Daniel knew that God reveals his secrets by virtue of his mercy alone. He understood what Jacob meant when he said, “I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant” (Gen. 32:10). This awareness helped Daniel to walk in the kind of humility that brings a man before God’s throne. “LORD, thou hast heard the desire of the humble,” says Psalm 10:17, “thou wilt cause thine ear to hear.” Truly, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6). Daniel went to sleep that night with the calm assurance of someone who knows his prayer will be answered. By the grace of God, “then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision” (Dan. 2:19). In a vision in the night, God showed Daniel Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and its meaning. Daniel’s heart was filled with praise for the God of heaven who “revealeth the deep and secret things” (v. 22), and “hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee” (v. 23).

The next day Daniel went before the king to tell him the dream and the interpretation of it. “The secret which the king hath demanded cannot the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsay-

ers, shew unto the king,” Daniel said. “But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets” (vv. 27–28). That is what a revelation is. It is a secret thing revealed.

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that he had dreamed of a great image, whose “head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay” (vv. 32–33). This dream foretold the Gentile empires that would rise and fall to rule over the land of Judah in an era that Jesus would later refer to as “the times of the Gentiles.”

And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled. (Luke 21:24)

Daniel told the king that God knew of his desire to see the future. “As for thee, O king,” said Daniel, “thy thoughts came into thy mind upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass” (Dan. 2:29). But like Joseph before him, Daniel would not take any credit for being the recipient of the revelation. “But as for me,” he said, “this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but for their sakes that shall make known the interpretation to the king, and that thou mightest know the thoughts of thy heart” (v. 30).

I am reminded of a time when my father-in-law, who is a shrimp fisherman by trade, came back from an outing very happy for his bountiful catch. He thanked me for praying over him before he left, that he might have a safe and prosperous fishing trip. I was tempted to encourage his perception of me as a “holy” man, but the Lord quickly reproved me for my wickedness. “Don’t thank me for making a prayer,” I told him, even as God was telling me. “Thank the one who *answered* that prayer.” If it were not for God’s mercies, all our prayers would bring us nothing but a sore throat.

Nebuchadnezzar recognized that the God of Israel was superior to all the gods he had known. “Of a truth it is,” he said to Daniel, “that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, seeing thou couldest reveal this secret” (v. 47). The king of Babylon kept his promise concerning the man who could reveal the dream and its interpretation. He “made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon” (v. 48).



THE TWO BASKETS OF FIGS

Previously, we read of the incredible turn-of-events that led to Joseph's appointment as the governor of Egypt. The chronicles of Daniel are equally amazing. The story of Daniel begins "in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah" (Dan. 1:1). About three years had passed since the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah, "in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim" (Jer. 27:1), foretelling the rise of the Babylonian Empire. Word was sent to "the king of Edom, and to the king of Moab, and to the king of the Ammonites, and to the king of Tyrus, and to the king of Zidon" (Jer. 27:3) that God had "given all these lands unto the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon," whom he called "my servant" (v. 6). God's message was plain: surrender, or die.

And it shall come to pass, *that* the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand. (v. 8)

Those who surrendered were promised protection.

But the nations that bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, those will I let remain still in their own land, saith the LORD; and they shall till it, and dwell therein. (v. 11)

These pagan kings were warned to forsake any contrary advice given by their spiritual counselors.

Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish. (vv. 9-10)

Such a word went to Zedekiah, the king of Judah, as well.

I spake also to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words, saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live. Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the LORD hath spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? (vv. 12-13)

He too was warned to ignore any contrary advice given by the ly-

ing prophets of Judah.

Therefore hearken not unto the words of the prophets that speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. (vv. 14–15)

As you can imagine, those who opposed Jeremiah's ministry had an easy time discrediting him in the eyes of the Judean king. How dare he suggest that they surrender to the Babylonians! Encouraged by the lies of the false prophets, the armies of Judah rose up against Babylon. They were sorely defeated.

Soon after Nebuchadnezzar's second assault on Jerusalem (in which even more Hebrews were carried off to Babylon) God showed Jeremiah a vision of two baskets of figs. In biblical symbolism, the fig tree represents the nation of Israel. One basket held figs that were very good, and the other held figs that were very evil. The evil figs represented the rebellious king Zedekiah and his followers. They would be removed from their homeland and scattered over the face of the earth. So began the *Diaspora*, the dispersion of the Jews. (This is why, on the day of Pentecost, there were Jews "out of every nation under heaven"!)

And as the evil figs, which cannot be eaten, they are so evil; surely thus saith the LORD, So will I give Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, that remain in this land, and them that dwell in the land of Egypt: And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for *their* hurt, *to be* a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them. And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, among them, till they be consumed from off the land that I gave unto them and to their fathers. (Jeremiah 24:8–10)

The good figs were those who were obedient to the word of the Lord. "Like these good figs," said God, "so will I acknowledge them that are carried away captive of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans for their good" (Jer. 24:5). Even Daniel might have found it difficult to believe that the captivity of the Hebrews was "for their good." But after all the pieces of the puzzle fell into place, the wisdom of God was obvious. Even before the dust had settled in the destruction of Jerusalem, Daniel was installed as "chief of the governors" in Babylon, with the authority to oversee all the

decisions that were made concerning the Hebrews living there. For those who rebelled against God, Babylon was their worst nightmare. But for those who submitted to his will, there was no safer haven on earth.

As Christians living in the world today, we need to remember that it is God who “removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Dan. 2:21). Our prayer to God that “Thy will be done” is, in essence, a prayer of surrender. There will be times when this prayer seems as difficult to believe as God’s counsel concerning Babylon seemed to many of the Judeans. But in the end, we will all realize that surrender to God has always been the only road to victory.



## 25.

### *THE GIFT OF THE WORD OF KNOWLEDGE*

## WENT NOT MINE HEART WITH THEE?

The books of Kings and Chronicles record parallel events in history, but each book speaks from its own unique perspective. The books of Kings emphasize the kings and prophets of the ten northern tribes of Israel, while the books of Chronicles highlight the kings and prophets of the southern tribes of Judah. Elijah and Elisha were prophets in Israel, not Judah. That is why Elijah is mentioned only once in the Chronicles (in 2 Chronicles 21:12) and Elisha not at all. Similarly, the great Judaen prophet Jeremiah is not mentioned at all in the books of Kings.

In the fifth chapter of 2 Kings, we read the story of Elisha's encounter with Naaman, a captain in the Syrian army. Naaman was a national hero "because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria" (2 Kings 5:1). His exploits in battle were relived in story and song, and were a part of every soldier's military training. Young boys played war games in the streets, pretending to be Naaman the Great. But all of his medals and honors could not hide the fact that women shuddered when they saw him, and men thought twice before shaking his hand; for this mighty man of war was also a leper.

Just as in the accounts of Joseph and Daniel, the events of this narrative center upon the faith of a young slave; this time, a young girl.

In many ways, she is the central figure of this story. All we know of this unnamed maiden is that she was captured by the Syrians, and made to serve in the home of Naaman. The devil could take away her family, her friends, and her home, but he could not take away her faith. I pray that I would be found so faithful in the face of such testing. It was this slave girl who told Naaman's wife of the great prophet living in Israel's capital city, saying, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy" (v. 3).

Did the young girl realize that she spoke forth a revelation, a word of knowledge? Perhaps not, but when the Syrian king learned of this prophet who could cure disease, he was quick to act. He wrote a letter to the king of Israel, saying that he had "sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy" (v. 6). The king of Israel completely misread his intentions. "Am I God?" he cried out, "to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me" (v. 7). Happily, Elisha the prophet understood what was unfolding. "Let him come now to me," he told his king, "and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel" (v. 8).

Now, Naaman did not travel from Syria to Israel on a bicycle. A parade of soldiers, horses, and chariots accompanied him to the house of the prophet. Naaman came to Israel bedecked in all the splendor of his office. Undoubtedly he expected Elisha to treat him like people everywhere treated him, with eyes glazed over in awe. He was sure Elisha would be honored just to meet him. All this was going through his mind when he "came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha" (v. 9). Imagine his surprise when it was not Elisha, but only his lowly servant who answered the door with the simple message, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean" (v. 10).

The Bible makes no secret of Naaman's displeasure. "But Naaman was wroth," say verses 10 and 11, "and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper." Naaman expected a spectacle, a performance complete with shouting and waving of hands. Why? Because that is how all the pagan "faith healers" and exorcists in Syria carried on. Is it not ironic that this is precisely what many Christians have come to expect today? As someone said, how often we err in looking for the spectacular rather than the miraculous!

Many years ago, when revival meetings were held in tents rather than auditoriums, preachers had to rely on the strength of their voice to get the message to the people in the back row. But when most people speak, their volume trails off at the end of each sentence. The preacher would talk about “the name of Jesus,” but all the people in the back row could hear was “the name of Jee.” In order to compensate, preachers learned to add an extra syllable to the last word of each phrase. “Jesus” became “Jesus-*suh*.” If you ever hear recordings of old-time preachers, you can hear them using this speaking technique. “And now-*wuh*, I want to invite you-*uh*, to the altar-*ruh*, and I will pray for you-*uh* in the name of Jesus-*suh*.” Everyone could hear; everyone could understand; and because of God’s anointing, many people who came to those meetings were delivered of their afflictions.

As the years rolled by, up-and-coming preachers sought to duplicate the fire of those early revival meetings. Sadly, they imitated the *style* and not the *substance*. Soon preachers around the world were parroting this style of speech. Even today, in the age of wireless microphones and digital sound engineering, you can tune into almost any religious broadcast and hear someone praying “in the name of Jesus-*suh*.” But why should we be surprised? This is what the church has been taught to expect.

Naaman was looking for style instead of substance. He had expected Elisha to carry on like a sorcerer, waving his hands and shouting. Of course, Naaman is not the only person who has been deceived by erroneous expectations. When John the Baptist failed to meet the people’s standards, Jesus pointedly asked, “What were you looking for?”

But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft *clothing* are in kings’ houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. (Matthew 11:8–9)

When the people of Lycaonia saw the deeds of the apostle Paul, they cried out, “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men” (Acts 14:11). Perhaps the people of Corinth were expecting men in the likeness of their Greek gods. The image they had of a “man of God” conflicted with what their eyes were seeing. They were greatly impressed when they read Paul’s letters; that is, until they met him in person. “For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful,” wrote Paul in amusement, “but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:10).

Many people have preconceived ideas of how a man of God should look, talk, and act. Sometimes I think God called me to the ministry just because he wanted to challenge these notions. People often tell me that I am not the kind of man they were expecting.

I was conducting a seminar in the village of Etgert, Germany. A visitor to the class who knew me only by name walked up to my American friend, extended his hand and said, "It is a privilege to meet you, Rev. Sullivan." Then he gave me a look that seemed to say, *It is good that you have come to hear this man's class. I am sure you will find the help you need.*

Naaman's servants persuaded him to obey the simple command of the prophet, and upon Naaman's obedience, he was miraculously cleansed of his leprosy, "and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child" (v. 14). When Naaman finally met Elisha, it was this mighty soldier who was the humbled one.

Naaman tried to show his gratitude to Elisha by giving him a gift, but the man of God refused to accept it. "As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none," he said. "And he urged him to take it; but he refused" (v. 16).

Why did Elisha refuse the Syrian's gift? This was a *revelation* to him. The Lord had a reason for keeping Elisha from accepting Naaman's gift, a reason that had nothing to do with gift giving, or the particular gifts presented by Naaman. There was sin in Elisha's camp that needed to be purged in order for God's blessing to remain.

Gehazi, the servant of Elisha, was not happy to see Naaman's caravan departing for Syria still heavy laden with all the treasures he brought to give to Elisha. Quickly, he devised a way to relieve Naaman of some of his burden.

But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, *as* the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him. So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw *him* running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, *Is* all well? And he said, *All is* well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. (vv. 20–22)

*My master changed his mind*, lied Gehazi to Naaman. *He just remembered some friends who could really use your help. He told me,*



*“Well, I don’t need these things, but I know some people who do.” So he sent me running after you. Really. That’s why I’m here.*

Gehazi’s speech pleased Naaman. After all, the Syrian’s intention was to give *all* these gifts to Elisha.

And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid *them* upon two of his servants; and they bare *them* before him. And when he came to the tower, he took *them* from their hand, and bestowed *them* in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed. (vv. 23–24)

As soon as Naaman was gone, Gehazi quickly hid away the treasures, and ran back to Elisha to avoid any suspicion. But as Elisha sat in his house, he had received a word from God telling him what Gehazi had done.

But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence *comest thou*, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither. (v. 25)

If the situation were not so grave, it would be amusing. Every parent knows that if your child is acting suspiciously, and you ask, “What are you doing?” and the answer you get is, “Nothing!” trouble is definitely afoot! Elisha let Gehazi know that his secret was exposed.

And he said unto him, Went not mine heart *with thee*, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? *Is it* a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maid-servants? (v. 26)

By a word of knowledge, Elisha knew exactly what his servant had done. Sadly for Gehazi, there was one more revelation in store for him.

The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper *as white* as snow. (v. 27)

Before you judge this punishment too severe, consider this: Gehazi was entrusted with a great privilege and responsibility to serve the man of God, and yet he had lied to him, and stolen property from his guest. Now, thieves don’t start off their criminal careers by robbing banks. They start out shoplifting at the corner store. How long had Gehazi been stealing from Elisha, taking for himself gifts that were intended for the man of God? I sincerely doubt that Gehazi would choose an intimidating man like Naaman to be his first victim. God

was protecting his servant. He wants to protect you and me as well. That is why it is so important that we walk in the revelation gifts.

In these three illustrations of the gift of the word of knowledge, in the stories of Joseph, Daniel, and an unnamed slave girl, we have seen how God uses the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty. Three slaves, walking in the use of the revelation gift of the word of knowledge, brought glory to God by bringing hidden things to light.

## 26.

### *THE GIFT OF THE WORD OF WISDOM*

## WISDOM IS PROFITABLE TO DIRECT

Two men met along a path. One man was empty-handed and hungry. The other carried a basket of ten mangos. “Ah brother,” said the empty-handed man, “where did you get such fine mangos? All the land is hot and dry.”

“Praise be to God,” said the other man. “I have discovered a wonderful tree. Each day it gives me ten mangos: one for me, one for my wife, and one for each of our seven children, plus one to give away. Here, my friend, you may have that one.”

“Oh thank you sir,” said the hungry man, and he quickly ate it up. It was delicious! “But please sir,” he said, “I will hunger again tomorrow. Give me another.”

“No, my friend. The remainder is for my family. But if you will listen, I will teach you where to find this tree for yourself.”

“I have no interest in your tree,” he said. “I only want the fruit. You are a selfish, selfish man.” And he walked away angry.

### THE PRINCIPAL THING

When Saul met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:5–6), he asked him the two most important questions a man will ever ask.

First he said, "Who art thou, Lord?" The Lord answered, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Paul was so astonished by this answer that he began to tremble. Then he asked Jesus the only question that remained: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"

The phrase "What would Jesus do?" is often used to remind Christians to conduct themselves in a manner that well represents their religion. But we must not misinterpret this saying to suggest that we should try to *figure out* the proper Christian response to a situation at hand. Imagine walking into a church that seems more concerned with the sale of religious goods than with true worship. You ask yourself, "What would Jesus do?" Well, on one occasion, he overturned all the tables, and used a whip to drive the merchants out of the building! Is that what Jesus wants you to do? You had better be sure! When you ask, "What would Jesus do?" to whom are you addressing your question? If you are asking yourself, you are asking for trouble! How much better it is to ask, "Lord, what would *you* have me to do?"

It is good to *confess* that Jesus is Lord, but far better to *obey* him as Lord. Jesus asked, "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). When you call Jesus your Lord, but continue to walk in a path of your own choosing, "thine own mouth condemneth thee, and not I: yea, thine own lips testify against thee" (Job 15:6).

To know the specific direction that Jesus wants you to take requires a certain kind of understanding. The thing that is needed is wisdom, the companion of knowledge. It is wisdom that answers the question, "Lord, what would you have me to do?"

Do you remember the man of Luke 14:30 who "began to build, and was not able to finish"? He failed because he did not have "sufficient to finish." But what was he lacking? What is the single most important ingredient in any successful Christian venture? What is the one thing Christians cannot lack if they are going to finish their race?

Some people say their church needs more love. Others insist their church needs more power. Too many believe that what their church needs most is more money. What does God say? What is the *principle* thing?

Wisdom *is* the principal thing; *therefore* get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. (Proverbs 4:7)

God could not state it any plainer. *Wisdom* is the principal thing; it is our first and most basic need. As pertaining to this mortal life, it is the greatest treasure we can obtain. Getting wisdom should be our

first priority. But how do we obtain it? Does it require great wisdom to get wisdom? That would not do us much good, would it? “Ask,” said Jesus, “and ye shall receive” (John 16:24). We simply need to ask God for this wonderful gift.

If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. (James 1:5)

So often we ask for the fruit of wisdom rather than wisdom itself. We want the *benefits* of our faith without living by the *precepts* of our faith. Wisdom, says Proverbs 3:18, “is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her.”

Happy *is* the man *that* findeth wisdom, and the man *that* getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it *is* better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She *is* more precious than rubies: and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days *is* in her right hand; *and* in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways *are* ways of pleasantness, and all her paths *are* peace. (Proverbs 3:13–17)

Proverbs 10:21 teaches that “fools die for want of wisdom.” Because God has made it so easy to acquire his wisdom, you could also say, “fools die for want of asking.”

### THE PROFIT OF WISDOM

Imagine that you are using a machete to cut a path through a thick jungle forest. If you have kept your blade clean and sharp, this knife will serve you well. But if you have neglected your blade and let it become rusty and dull, the knife will be of little use to you. Instead of the blade doing the work, it will be your arms, shoulders, and back.

If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom *is* profitable to direct. (Ecclesiastes 10:10)

Trying to find your way through life without wisdom is like trying to cut a jungle path with only a dull blade. But with wisdom, you can find your way through any situation. Wisdom, says the Bible, is profitable to direct! Wisdom leads you down the right path.

I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths. (Proverbs 4:11)

The Bible refers to our calling as “the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). Our race is against time. With so much to do, we often

find ourselves trying to fit thirty hours of living into a twenty-four-hour day. We hope to find “extra time” to get things done, but there is no such thing. Each day consists of twenty-four hours, no more and no less. In this mortal life, time is our most precious commodity. It cannot be replenished; once it is spent, it is gone forever. Wisdom helps us to understand how to spend our time wisely by teaching us what is truly worthwhile.

Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.  
(Luke 10:38–42)

It is easy to picture Martha, so consumed with all the work that needed doing. To make matters worse, her sister Mary was pointedly ignoring her obvious need for help! Have you ever noticed how *noisy* people can be when they are doing work they don’t want to do? I imagine Martha washing the dishes, muttering to herself in a voice just loud enough for Mary to hear, *Look at her, just sitting there!* She scrubbed the dish so ferociously that soapsuds washed over the tub. *Do I have to do everything around this house?* Finally, she could hold it in no longer. *Lord, don’t you care either? Why don’t you tell her to help me!* Then Jesus directed Martha to a better way. Of all the choices that could be made that day, Mary made the best one.

Every choice you make in life is at the expense of other choices you could have made. Wisdom saves you from a life of regret. Wisdom directs you to the best choice out of many options. It is profitable to direct.

### PRESUMPTUOUS SINS

The duty of a “good soldier of Jesus Christ” is to “please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:3–4). A wise soldier knows that he will not achieve victory on the spiritual battlefield through his own strength or courage. A Christian soldier stands or falls according to his obedience to the Lord.

Wisdom is profitable to direct, but only to that man who will sub-

mit to direction. Some people are held captive by a spirit of pride that resists any counsel but their own. Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." Peter wrote of certain people that "walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (2 Pet. 2:9). Being self-willed is a sure road to ruin for a minister of the Gospel. This vice disqualifies a man from running the spiritual race.

For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre. (Titus 1:7)

It should be our continual prayer that God would deliver us from the evil of being self-willed. "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins," says Psalm 19:13, "let them not have dominion over me." All the weapons of war are useless to the soldier who will not obey. This becomes very obvious in the story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt into the Promised Land.

As we have already learned, the children of Israel refused to enter the land of Canaan for fear of the inhabitants of the land. In judgment, God condemned that generation to wander in the wilderness for forty years. Faced with such dread consequence, the Israelites added sin to sin by presumptuously taking it upon themselves to invade the land of Canaan. It was too late; the door of opportunity had slammed shut, and they were sorely defeated.

Then ye answered and said unto me, We have sinned against the LORD, we will go up and fight, according to all that the LORD our God commanded us. And when ye had girded on every man his weapons of war, ye were ready to go up into the hill. And the LORD said unto me, Say unto them, Go not up, neither fight; for I *am* not among you; lest ye be smitten before your enemies. So I spake unto you; and ye would not hear, but rebelled against the commandment of the LORD, and went presumptuously up into the hill. And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, *even* unto Hormah. (Deuteronomy 1:41-44)

This event is also recorded in the fourteenth chapter of Numbers, with added detail:

And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper. Go not up, for the LORD *is* not among you; that ye be not smitten before your

enemies. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites *are* there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp. (Numbers 14:41–44)

Despite the warning, the soldiers went off to war on their own accord, leaving Moses and the Ark of the Covenant behind in the camp. How foolish we are when we think we can find success without God's blessing. Without wisdom, all our battles will be fought in vain.

### THE TRAGIC DEATH OF KING JOSIAH

No one is immune from the temptation of presumptuous sin. In fact, the more success you see in your ministry, the greater the likelihood that you will stop asking for God's wisdom, and begin relying upon your own. Yes, "he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool," and "fools die for want of wisdom." The tragic death of the great Judean king Josiah underscores the fact that our battles must be of the Lord's choosing and not of ourselves.

It is difficult to express how wonderful a man of God was King Josiah. Three hundred and sixty years before it came to pass, Josiah was named in prophecy as the man who would destroy the idolatrous temple at Bethel (see 1 Kings 13:2). His reign was a beacon of light sandwiched between the dark reigns of his grandfather Manasseh (who, according to Christian tradition, was responsible for the tortuous death of the prophet Isaiah), his father Amon, and his own son and grandsons who sat on the throne as Jerusalem burned to the ground. But as for Josiah, he "did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father, and declined neither to the right hand, nor to the left" (2 Chron. 34:2).

And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there *any* like him. (2 Kings 23:25)

The day came when Josiah entered a battle in which he had no business. However noble his intentions, he acted of his own accord, and not in the counsel of the Lord. In his mercy, the Good Shepherd endeavored to call him back from his error, even as he calls back all those that stray.

And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This *is*



the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. (Isaiah 30:21)

Necho, the king of Egypt, sent a strong word of warning to Josiah, saying, "Forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not" (2 Chron. 35:21). But Josiah "hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God" (v. 22), and the mighty king was killed in battle. The Bible says that "all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah" (v. 24), but no one mourned more than God and Jeremiah his prophet.

And Jeremiah lamented for Josiah: and all the singing men and the singing women spake of Josiah in their lamentations to this day, and made them an ordinance in Israel: and, behold, they are written in the lamentations. (v. 25)

Psalm 116:15 says, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints." The tragic and costly death of Josiah is made even worse by the fact that he died foolishly. He should never have been on the battlefield that day.

The Gospel road has been paved with the blood of martyrs. The Testimony of the Ages proves that our spiritual freedoms have come at a great cost. As Jesus foretold, "The time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:2). We do not need to make Satan's job any easier. In spiritual warfare, wisdom is an absolute necessity.

Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty *men* which are in the city. (Ecclesiastes 7:19)

How important is wisdom? Every mistake you have ever made was due to a lack of it! Thank God that he has given us a way to walk in the wisdom from above. All we have to do is ask, "Lord, what would you have me to do?"



*THE GIFT OF THE WORD OF WISDOM*

## THOU SHALT GUIDE ME WITH THY COUNSEL

A mother bird was preparing her three daughters to go out into the world. One day she tried to teach them how to build a nest. "The first things you will need," she said, "are some twigs." Immediately one of the little birdies flew off and tried to make a nest out of twigs. But the twigs would not hold together, and her nest fell apart. Now there were only two birdies left in the nest. The mother continued to teach. "Next," she said, "you will need some grass to weave in with the twigs." Off flew the second birdie, and she tried to make a nest out of twigs and grass. But there were big holes in her nest, and her eggs fell through to the ground and broke. Now there was only one birdie left in the mother's nest. The mother told her, "Now you will need some mud to hold everything together so that your nest stays secure, warm, and dry." The only birdie who was successful in building a nest was the one who stayed to hear the whole story.

I first heard this story years ago from the man who ordained me to the ministry. It makes a wonderful point. We need to be fully instructed; we need the whole truth. It is one thing to learn the facts of a situation. It is quite another thing to know how to properly utilize the information you have been given. Herein we see our great need for wisdom. Knowledge is power, but wisdom holds the key to that

power. Wisdom is the proper application of knowledge. Without wisdom, all the gifts of the Spirit will be misused. Perhaps this is why the word of wisdom is listed first in the series of spiritual manifestations found in 1 Corinthians 12:8–10. Wisdom is the principal thing and therefore needed to ensure that the other eight gifts are used in one accord with God’s will.

Once God has given you a word of knowledge, the thing you need to know is “Lord, what would you have me to do now?” Just as wisdom is a companion to knowledge, the word of wisdom is a companion gift to the word of knowledge. The gift of the word of wisdom is the ability God gives whereby you can receive a revelation of counsel, telling you what God wants you to do with the information you received by way of the word of knowledge.

### A WORD OF WISDOM TO JOSEPH

By a word of knowledge Joseph learned the meaning of the Pharaoh’s dream. Egypt would enjoy seven years of wonderful prosperity, followed by seven years of terrible dearth. But this knowledge would be of little value to the Pharaoh if he did not know how to apply it. That is why we need wisdom. Wisdom is profitable to direct! After you receive the first revelation (a word of knowledge), you need the second (a word of wisdom) to carry out the Lord’s will. By a word of wisdom we learn what the Lord wants us to do with the information he has provided.

A word of wisdom is a revelation of instruction; it is a word of counsel. Proverbs 8:14 says, “Counsel is mine, and sound wisdom: I am understanding; I have strength.” A word of wisdom is a word of guidance. Psalm 73:24 says, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” Through the Lord’s counsel we are shown the way that results in victory.

Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end. (Proverbs 19:20)

God purposed to do more than show the Pharaoh a glimpse into his future. God wanted to show the king what to do during the coming years so that by the end of those fourteen years, Egypt would be a very prosperous nation. Joseph advised the Pharaoh according to the revelation of wisdom he had received.

Now therefore let Pharaoh look out a man discreet and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt. Let Pharaoh do *this*, and let him appoint officers over the land, and take up the fifth part of

the land of Egypt in the seven plenteous years. And let them gather all the food of those good years that come, and lay up corn under the hand of Pharaoh, and let them keep food in the cities. And that food shall be for store to the land against the seven years of famine, which shall be in the land of Egypt; that the land perish not through the famine. (Genesis 41:33–36)

Happily, the Pharaoh was quick to accept Joseph's counsel. "And the thing was good in the eyes of Pharaoh," says verse 37, "and in the eyes of all his servants." The Pharaoh appointed Joseph to implement this plan, and Egypt became the most prosperous nation on the earth. Verse 57 says, "And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands."

Why was the king of Egypt so mightily impressed by Joseph? Joseph had performed no miracle; he had done no supernatural wonder. As Proverbs 12:8 says, "A man shall be commended according to his wisdom." It was the *wisdom* of Joseph that captured the king's heart. The Pharaoh said to Joseph, "There is none so discreet and wise as thou art" (Gen. 41:39). Truly, in the story of Joseph and the Pharaoh we can see a living testimony of Ecclesiastes 8:1: "Who is as the wise man? and who knoweth the interpretation of a thing? a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the boldness of his face shall be changed."

### THE WISE COUNSEL OF JETHRO

The Midianites were descendants of Abraham by Keturah, who is called both his wife and concubine in the Bible. The land of Midian was located in the Arabian Peninsula across the Red Sea from the Sinai Peninsula. As a young man, Moses had fled to Midian from Egypt in order to escape the Pharaoh's wrath. The king of Egypt (who was also Moses' adoptive father) had ordered his death when he learned that Moses had killed an Egyptian taskmaster in order to protect a Hebrew slave.

Even though it had already caused him great trouble, Moses once again came to the aid of the defenseless soon after his arrival in Midian. He rescued seven young women from harassment by shepherds at a well. These seven girls were the daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian. Soon after, the former prince of Egypt married one of Jethro's daughters, and for forty years, he lived a shepherd's life.

Then, marvelous events began to unfold that no man could have imagined. In answer to the call of God, Moses left his family in Midian

and returned to Egypt on a mission to deliver the Children of Israel from their land of bondage. But before he departed, Moses sought the blessing and permission of his father-in-law.

And Moses went and returned to Jethro his father in law, and said unto him, Let me go, I pray thee, and return unto my brethren which *are* in Egypt, and see whether they be yet alive. And Jethro said to Moses, Go in peace. (Exodus 4:18)

Moses did not see his family again until after he returned from Egypt. It was a joyful reunion.

And Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, *and* all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and *how* the LORD delivered them. And Jethro rejoiced for all the goodness which the LORD had done to Israel, whom he had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. (Exodus 18:8–9)

The glorious experiences Moses had with God and his exalted stature among the Hebrews did not diminish his respect for his father-in-law. Even though Jethro had not participated in the Exodus journey, he was welcomed as an equal among the priests of Israel, as evidenced by the fact that he administered the sacrificial offerings, and dined with the elders.

And Jethro, Moses' father in law, took a burnt offering and sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the elders of Israel, to eat bread with Moses' father in law before God. (v. 12)

The next day Jethro watched Moses work all day to settle the personal disputes of the Israelites. Jethro asked, "What is this thing that thou doest to the people? Why sittest thou thyself alone, and all the people stand by thee from morning unto even?" (v. 14). Moses answered, "Because the people come unto me to enquire of God: When they have a matter, they come unto me; and I judge between one and another, and I do make them know the statutes of God, and his laws" (v. 16).

Imagine the endless line of people waiting to speak to Moses. One by one, Moses counseled them in matters large and small. Some disputes were quickly settled, but others took time to resolve. This was not only taxing on Moses, but also on the people waiting in line to speak to him. Remember that Jethro's question to Moses was "What are you doing *to the people?*"

I am sure that Jethro had spent his day doing more than watching Moses work. He had been making prayerful intercession for him as

well. Now he had something to say.

And Moses' father in law said unto him, The thing that thou doest *is* not good. Thou wilt surely wear away, both thou, and this people that *is* with thee: for this thing *is* too heavy for thee; thou art not able to perform it thyself alone. (vv. 17–18)

Jethro had received a revelation, a word of knowledge concerning Moses. If Moses did not change his way of doing things, he would not finish running his race. Both he and the people would collapse. But Jethro had more for Moses than a word of warning. Jethro gave his son-in-law the counsel of the Lord, which he had received in a word of wisdom. "Hearken now unto my voice," he said. "I will give thee counsel, and God shall be with thee" (v. 19).

What if Jethro had only waited to receive the first revelation before rushing off to chastise Moses? Telling people that they are wrong is only half the story. If you want to help them, you also need to tell them how to make things right. Wisdom is profitable to direct!

By a revelation of a word of wisdom Jethro counseled Moses concerning the changes that needed to be made. "This thing is too heavy for thee," he had said. There are some burdens that a man must bear for himself. Galatians 6:5 says, "For every man shall bear his own burden." But there are other burdens that must be shared. Verse 2 says, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." It takes wisdom to know the difference.

Moses' personal burden was to "teach them ordinances and laws" and "shew them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do" (Exod. 18:20). He was about to receive a lesson in the delegation of authority.

Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place *such* over them, *to be* rulers of thousands, *and* rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, *that* every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear *the burden* with thee. (vv. 21– 22).

A strong man with a good axe can bring down a large tree. But one man alone does not have the strength to carry it off. That tree must be cut into smaller pieces. Then everyone can work together to bear it one piece at a time, according to his strength. The same is true in the church. The workload must be distributed "to every man ac-

ording to his several ability” (Matt. 25:15). If you overburden a man, you will cause him to stumble. If you entrust a man with too little, he must look for other opportunities to grow.

Jethro made sure that Moses recognized that this was more than fatherly advice. “If thou shalt do this thing,” he said, “and God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to endure, and all this people shall also go to their place in peace” (Exod. 18:23).

Numbers 12:3 says, “The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” Would to God that we all walked in that same “meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (1 Pet. 3:4). Thank God for men like Moses, meek enough to hearken to wise reproof, meek enough to accept help.

So Moses hearkened to the voice of his father in law, and did all that he had said. And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people, rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves. (Exodus 18:24–26)

Jethro was not challenging Moses’ authority, neither was he meddling “as a busybody in other men’s matters” (1 Pet. 4:15). Jethro had a word from the Lord for Moses, and having relieved himself of that burden, he left to tend to his own responsibilities. “And Moses let his father in law depart,” says Exodus 18:27, “and he went his way into his own land.”



## 28.

### *THE GIFT OF THE WORD OF WISDOM*

### WISE AS SERPENTS AND HARMLESS AS DOVES

No mortal man has ever communed with divine wisdom so closely as King Solomon. But Solomon did not spring forth from his mother's womb possessing this wonderful attribute. His wisdom was a gift from above, given to him at an hour appointed by God.

When King David was "old and stricken in years" (1 Kings 1:1), he declared to the governors of Israel that "of all my sons, (for the LORD hath given me many sons,) he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel" (1 Chron. 28:5). Nevertheless, Solomon's reign as king began in a storm of contention. His older brother, Adonijah, rejected David's proclamation, and tried to claim the throne for himself. Adonijah gained the support of Abiathar the priest, and Joab the commander of David's army, giving an air of legitimacy to his usurpation. When David was told of Adonijah's rebellion, he sent Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet to anoint Solomon king, even though David was still alive. Adonijah begged Solomon for mercy, and the new king pardoned him. But after David died, Adonijah again tried to usurp the throne. Solomon perceived his threat and ordered his execution. He then sent Abiathar into exile and, in accordance with his father's last wishes, had Joab put to death.

Surely these events troubled Solomon, filling his mind with self-doubt. Would he be able to rule Israel with the same virtue as his father? Would he be able to inspire allegiance amongst his governors and chief advisors? When God appeared to Solomon, the new king was clearly feeling the weight of his crown.

God appeared to Solomon in a dream. “Ask what I shall give thee,” said the Lord. Solomon answered, “O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” (1 Kings 3:7, 9). God was delighted by Solomon’s request, both in what he asked for, and what he did not ask for.

And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. (vv. 11–13)

Verse 15 reads, “And Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream.” This verse holds the key to understanding this event. It is not that Solomon was so wise that he knew to ask God for wisdom. We do not know what Solomon might have asked if God appeared to him when he was awake. But, as the Bible testifies, Solomon *dreamed* that he asked God for wisdom.

Now, I have had dreams in which I flew like a bird, but in truth, I never left my bed. I have dreamed of conversations with all sorts of people, but those conversations did not actually occur. Solomon did not speak to God. He *dreamed* he spoke to God. God appeared to Solomon in a dream, and through this dream, God worked in him “both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). God taught Solomon that, if he would make wisdom his first priority, wisdom would lead him to success in all other aspects of his life. “Length of days is in her right hand,” says Proverbs 3:16, “and in her left hand riches and honour.”

If the Lord came to you with the same proposal, what would be your response? It is not a difficult question to answer. As of late, what

has been your most frequent petition of the Lord? Better health? Improved relations with the people around you? Prosperity? Most people ask God for the *fruit* of a spiritual life rather than the *means* to a fruitful life. “The prosperity of fools shall destroy them,” warns Proverbs 1:32. “Wisdom,” says Ecclesiastes 7:12, “giveth life to them that have it.”

God gave Solomon a test, but first he provided him with the correct response. Wisdom is profitable to direct! The correct answer to God’s question, “Ask what I shall give thee?” is “Give me an understanding heart.” Yes, “Solomon awoke; and, behold, it was a dream.” But what do you suppose he asked God for after he awoke? Now that you understand the meaning of this dream, what will *you* ask God to give you?

Our Father in heaven is very wise. He knows that often the best way to get us to do his will is to let us think it was our idea all along!

The late 1980s and early 1990s were difficult years for me. The church I had belonged to since the time of my conversion collapsed in controversy and dissension. My best friend died. After nine years of marriage, my wife decided she wanted a divorce. Happily for me, I was awarded custody of our six-year-old daughter, but that came only after a long and exhausting court proceeding. My days were consumed with work, the care of my daughter, and my own self-pity. Gradually my heart turned cold towards God.

I had been a very active Christian for almost twenty years. But now I realized that my allegiance had been to the organization that told me of salvation, rather than to Christ who saved me. As time passed I began to recognize the tug of God on my heart, calling me back to the spiritual race. Still, I was afraid that I would repeat the same mistakes. I felt moved to pray. I told God that I was not good at recognizing subtle hints. “But if you will show me what you want me to do,” I promised, “and give me an answer so plain that my only response can be either to obey or to rebel, I will do my best to obey.”

I congratulated myself for what I thought was a very clever prayer. Soon he began to show me who was the clever one! His direction for my life became increasingly plain. I was trapped by my own words. What could I do but keep my promise to him?

Looking back, I know that the Holy Spirit led me to pray that prayer, even as Solomon was led to ask for wisdom. Before God can answer your prayers, he must first lead you to ask. “Ask what I shall give thee,” said God to Solomon. “Ask,” said Jesus, “and it shall be given you” (Matt. 7:7). But as they say, be careful what you ask for. You just might get it!

BRING ME A SWORD

Soon after his dream, Solomon faced a situation in which he had great need of wisdom to discern between good and bad. On this occasion a grieving mother stood before the king, seeking justice.

Then came there two women, *that were* harlots, unto the king, and stood before him. And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house. And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we *were* together; *there was* no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house. (1 Kings 3:16–18)

A terrible accident had occurred. “This woman’s child died in the night,” she said, “because she overlaid it.” But then, “she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear” (vv. 20–21).

The other woman denied any wrongdoing, saying, “Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son.” A fierce argument broke out before Solomon’s throne, as the first woman cried out, “No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son” (v. 22).

There are some interesting factors to this story that go unsaid. First of all, these two harlots were living together and they both gave birth within days of each other. There was not enough physical difference between the two babies to tell them apart. After all, the body of the deceased baby did not disappear. It would be simple enough to compare them. If one baby had blonde hair and the other brown, there would not be much point to this story. Given the occupation of these women, the fact that the two babies were born just three days apart, and that it was not obvious which child belonged to which mother, it is highly likely that the two harlots were related, and that one man fathered both children. It is important to realize that the dead child could have belonged to either woman.

Then said the king, The one saith, This *is* my son that liveth, and thy son *is* the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son *is* the dead, and my son *is* the living. (v. 23)

How could Solomon know which mother told the truth?

And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two,

and give half to the one, and half to the other. (vv. 24–25)

The onlookers gasped in horror. What kind of solution was this? Then bedlam erupted as the mother of the child tore herself loose from the grasp of the king's guards and threw her body between the sword and the child.

Then spake the woman whose the living child *was* unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, *but divide it*. (v. 26)

Suddenly not only Solomon but everyone else in the courtyard knew who was the mother of that baby. "Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it," said the king, "she is the mother thereof" (v. 27).

And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God *was* in him, to do judgment. (v. 28)

"Bring me a sword," said King Solomon, and by the sword he divided fact from fiction. The steel sword never touched the baby, but with a word of the Lord – a word of wisdom – he cut right to the heart of the matter. This is a word fitly spoken, a word that is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (Heb. 4:12); "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

A minister of the Lord must bear the sword of the Spirit with expertise. He must know how to walk in the wisdom from above. That is why we have been given the gift of the word of wisdom.

### A GREATER THAN SOLOMON

God kept his promise to Solomon, as 2 Chronicles 9:22–23 attests: "And king Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart." Powerful monarchs from near and far came to confer with the king of Israel. One of these rulers was the queen of Sheba.

And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions. And she came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. And Solomon told her all her questions: there was not *any* thing hid from the king, which he told her not. (1 Kings 10:1–3)

The queen was not disappointed in her expectations.

And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen *it*: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard. (vv. 6–7)

Centuries later, Jesus reminded the Jews of the great distance this pagan “queen of the south” had traveled to sit with Solomon. In contrast, God’s people could not be bothered to sit with him even when he came to them, when “God visited his people” (Luke 7:16).

The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon *is* here. (Luke 11:31)

The “greater than Solomon” is Jesus Christ, the embodiment of the living God. Jesus is “the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor. 1:24). He walked with wisdom in a way that no man has ever duplicated, as foretold by Isaiah the prophet. “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD” (Isa. 11:2).

Jesus well understood the deadly seriousness of the spiritual battle. He did not underestimate the strength of the enemy. He told his disciples, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves.” This was his mandate to them: “Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). This was the kind of wisdom that Jesus exemplified. Try as they might, his enemies could not find honest evidence to accuse him.

Early in the morning a group of people had gathered at the temple, listening in quiet reverence as Jesus taught them the Word of God. Suddenly their peace was shattered by the wails of a crying woman and the shouts of angry men. A group of Pharisees, easily recognizable due to their particular attire, had taken this woman naked and screaming from her lover’s bed, and were parading her toward the temple in full view of the public. Men, women, and children joined this shameful procession, yelling and cursing at her, spitting on her, kicking at her, and demanding her death. By the time they reached the temple, the woman was bloodied and bruised, the dirt caked to her blood and tears. Finally, the Pharisees spotted Jesus and yelled out to him. *Jesus! We have something to ask of you!*

They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with *his* finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not*. (John 8:4–6)

Jesus knew that these men were neither interested in the Law of Moses nor this woman's sin. Their only purpose for bringing her to him was to find a way to accuse and discredit him. But Jesus was not shaken, though he stood alone in the middle of this circling pack of ravening wolves. He was wise as a serpent, and harmless as a dove. Jesus paid them no mind, seemingly lost in his thoughts as he drew in the dirt. Jesus, who always did the Father's will, was seeking God's counsel. Wisdom is available to all, but given only to him who asks.

So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her. (v. 7)

The self-righteous smirks of the accusers melted away as they faced their own wretched condition. They had been so obsessed with the sins of the woman, they forgot their own.

And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard *it*, being convicted by *their own* conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, *even* unto the last: (vv. 8–9a)

The crowd disbanded. Now, Jesus could minister to the woman herself.

When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more. (vv. 10–11)

Jesus did not condemn the woman, but neither did he condone her sin. He instructed her. Wisdom is profitable to direct! "Go," said Jesus, "and sin no more."

There is a great difference between words of appreciation and words of flattery. Words of flattery are like palm branches concealing an open pit. "A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet," says Proverbs 29:5. Flattery flames the fire of pride, and as it is written, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

Many times, the accusers of Jesus tried to disarm him with flattery. Here is an example:

Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in *his* talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any *man*: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? (Matthew 22:15–17)

Jesus once told the Pharisees that their disciples were “twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matt. 23:15). These were the kind of men the Pharisees commissioned to entrap Jesus, along with certain others noted for their loyalty to Rome. You can practically hear the hissing of the serpent as they tried to wrap their coils around the Son of God. *Masssster! We think sssso highly of you! We know you sssspeak only the truth! You are the only person we know who is not afraid to sssstand up to Rome. Sssso tell ussss. Do you not think it issss time we sssstopped ssssending our money to Caesssar?*

These men tried to bait Jesus into criticizing Rome. One word of dissention was all they needed to ensure that he would be arrested for treason. But Jesus was not fooled.

But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose *is* this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar’s. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s. When they had heard *these words*, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way. (Matthew 22:18–22)

Because he walked in such wisdom, Jesus was the master of every situation. By the gift of the word of wisdom, you and I are able to follow his example. Jesus said, “For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luke 21:15). Years later, when facing his own accusers, Stephen stood on this promise and proved that it was true.

And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. (Acts 6:10)

Philippians 2:15 exhorts the people of God to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”



WISE AS SERPENTS AND HARMLESS AS DOVES

Wisdom is our straight path in a crooked and perverse nation. It is our stability in a very unstable world.

And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, *and* strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD *is* his treasure. (Isaiah 33:6)



## 29.

### *THE GIFT OF THE WORD OF WISDOM*

### THOU ART THE MAN

He who bears the sword of the Spirit must be ready and able to brandish it as the occasion demands. The sword of the Spirit can be used to decapitate serpents. It can also be used in delicate matters of the heart. In either case, the revelation gift of the word of wisdom is essential to the task. This is something we will see as we study the record of the restoration of King David.

As recorded in the book of 2 Samuel, David's fall from grace occurred "after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle" (2 Sam. 11:1). Rather than lead his men into battle himself, David sent his general Joab in his stead, while he "tarried still at Jerusalem." This is how his troubles began.

Verse 2 reports that "it came to pass in an eveningtide, that David arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house." We can only guess the reason for his restlessness. The phrase "after the year was expired" equals "at the return of the year" in 1 Kings 20:22, and both phrases refer to springtime. Jerusalem routinely experiences an early spring heat wave when winds blowing in from the desert raise the temperature as high as 90°F (32°C). Perhaps it was the heat of the night that stole away David's sleep, and led him to the cooler air on the roof. But maybe there was another reason. Perhaps

the king was wrestling with guilt for being absent from his army.

No house stood taller than the king's house; and standing on his rooftop, David could see for miles. I imagine him stretching his arms high as he yawned out loud. He thought of his army encamped in the fields, and said a prayer for their success. He looked up to the stars, and marveled at the wonder of the creation. He looked down at the housetops below him, and just for a moment, he considered how different his life would be if Samuel had not come to his father's house such a long time ago. Then, "from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon" (v. 2). David's mind was not wandering any more. I am not making excuse for him, but if the Bible says, "the woman was very beautiful to look upon," she must have been very beautiful indeed.

And David sent and enquired after the woman. And *one* said, *Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?* (v. 3)

That could have, and should have, been the end of this story. David learned that this woman belonged to another man. The Law of God was far from ambivalent on this matter.

And the man that committeth adultery with *another* man's wife, *even he* that committeth adultery with his neighbour's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death.  
(Leviticus 20:10)

To make matters worse, Bathsheba was married to a man that David knew. Uriah was one of David's most loyal soldiers. Surely that would be enough to dissuade him from entering into folly. But as the king continued to gaze upon this woman, his reason gave way to carnal desire. James 1:14 says, "But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."

There are three steps that lead to wrongdoing. The first step is the temptation to sin, when unlawful or immoral behavior presents itself as an option, a choice. The second step is wicked fantasy, when a person imagines himself engaging in and enjoying the illicit deed. The third step is the actualization of the sinful thought.

A temptation is a test, a time of proving. It is not a sin to be tempted. Hebrews 4:15 says that Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." If it were a sin to be tempted, he would not be without sin. But a temptation is only a point of decision. It is what you do *after* you are tempted that determines whether or not you commit sin.

Bathsheba did no wrong in bathing that night, nor did David sin when he happened to see her and admired her beauty. David's sin began the moment the idea of adulterous relations with this woman became pleasing to him. Jesus said, "Whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart" (Matt. 5:28).

Every magnet has two poles, the north pole and the south. When you place two magnets near each other, the north pole of one will attract the south pole of the other. Conversely, the two similar poles (north and north, or south and south) will repel each other.

Jesus Christ exemplified the sentiments of Romans 12:9: "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." The Son of God could not be attracted by evil. In that critical moment when sin tries to enter the imagination, Jesus never stumbled. He never even entertained the thought of acting in sin. Sin was as contrary to Jesus as the like poles of two magnets. He could not join himself to it.

All Christians should be equally repelled by evil. Unfortunately, we are often enticed by it and that is what leads us to sin. However, to be enticed is not to be overcome. In his mercy, God has provided a way for Christians to resist all manner of temptation.

There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*.

(1 Corinthians 10:13)

This verse contains many assurances. First, you will never face a temptation so unique that no one has faced it before. Second, God will shield you from any temptation that is too enticing for you to resist. Third, he will provide you with an alternative choice – a "way of escape" – to put room between you and the object of temptation. Furthermore, as added incentive to fight the good fight, God promises you a special reward each time you endure temptation without giving in to it.

Blessed *is* the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. (James 1:12)

As for David, his way of escape could not have been plainer. Bathsheba was in another building! David could simply go back inside his house. But instead, he rejected the way of escape. Enticed by his lust, he "sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto

him, and he lay with her,” says 2 Samuel 11:4, “and she returned unto her house.”

Do not be fooled. This is not a love story. David, a man whose palace overflowed with wives and concubines, did not romance Uriah’s wife. He used her for his pleasure, and then sent her home. You might ask, why didn’t Bathsheba resist his advances? I don’t have the answer to that, but I do know that nowhere in the Bible is Bathsheba condemned for her part in this matter.

Verse 5 says, “And the woman conceived, and sent and told David, and said, I am with child.” Obviously, there is a passage of time between verses four and five. Bathsheba could not know the next morning that she had conceived. How many weeks had to pass before she was resigned to the fact that she was carrying David’s baby, and found the courage to tell him? I imagine she spent that time praying the most popular prayer of all time: *Oh please, please, please God. If you get me out of this situation, I will never, never, never do anything like this again!*

In the meantime, David did his best to forget both her and his moment of weakness. Feasting in sin always leaves a terrible aftertaste of shame. He asked himself why, why, why did he not just go back inside his house. Certainly one of his wives or concubines would have enjoyed his company! I imagine that in the weeks that followed, David went out of his way to avoid Bathsheba, even ordering his guards to turn her away the first few times she tried to speak to him. You can be sure that when she finally did tell him of her pregnancy, it was the last thing he wanted to hear. Now it was David’s turn to pray that prayer!

David searched for a way to cover his sin. He knew that Bathsheba would be too afraid to tell her husband the truth, but what could he do about Uriah? David’s solution was to convince Uriah that the baby was his own. David called Bathsheba’s husband home from the battlefield. He filled him with food and wine, doing all he could to incite Uriah to go home and have relations with his wife. Nevertheless, the good soldier would not be persuaded.

And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing. (v. 11)

David’s heart turned cold. He decided that only Uriah’s death would fully conceal his sin. The king wrote a letter to Joab, ordering

the general, "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die" (v. 15). Then, in an act of almost inconceivable callousness, David made Uriah deliver his own death sentence to Joab.

And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men *were*. And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell *some* of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also. (vv. 16–17)

What went through Joab's mind as he sent a good soldier to certain death? How much did this contribute to the friction between him and David in later years? The Bible is silent on these matters, but we do know that the Ammonites prevailed in battle that day, and Joab prepared his messenger to deliver the bad news to the king. Joab suspected that David would put on a show of outrage for this defeat. "If so be that the king's wrath arise," he told his messenger, "then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also" (v. 20–21). He knew that would quiet him down. As it turned out, Joab's messenger must have thought that David took the bad news remarkably well.

Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him. (v. 25)

Uriah was dead. Again, the Bible does not speak of this, but I imagine David speaking a powerful eulogy at the state funeral: *Let the name of Uriah the Hittite never be forgotten. Let us never forget this faithful man who gave his life in service to his nation, his King, and his God.* He pauses a moment, as if he is debating whether to spare the crowd of more heartache. *I have just received news of something terribly sad. Uriah died not knowing that his wife Bathsheba is carrying his child!* He seems to struggle to compose himself, and then speaks out with a determined but trembling voice. *And so I make a pledge before you all, in honor of my fallen comrade, to take his wife to be my wife, and to raise his child as if it were my own!* The people cheer, their sorrow turning into love for their leader. *Long live the King!* they cry. *Long live the King!*

And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband. And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son ... (vv. 26–27a)

David thought his problem was resolved. He should have known better. Verse 27 ends with the words, “But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.” There is no hiding from God. As Numbers 32:23 says, “Be sure your sin will find you out.”

The man who cannot trust himself will distrust others as well. Each day David grew in suspicion and fear. He worried that Bathsheba would not keep their secret, or that someone might notice how much her son resembled him. Each time he met with Joab, he thought he saw a hint of contempt in his eyes. David was a prisoner of his own deceit, and without God’s intervention, he would surely be lost. But the Lord is faithful, and as 2 Samuel 12:1 begins, “And the LORD sent Nathan unto David.”

As we have learned in other lessons, it is vital to the success of your ministry that you act in obedience to God. This is the essence of wisdom. Somehow Nathan learned of David’s crime. It is not important how he found out – whether Joab told him, or Bathsheba, or if the information came directly from God by a revelation of a word of knowledge. The important thing is, Nathan did not act until he received guidance from the Lord. He waited until he had both the knowledge and the wisdom he needed to help David acknowledge and confess his sin.

What if Nathan had gone to David with only half the story, the knowledge of his sin? David had already killed one man to hide his transgression. How easy it would be to kill one more! But Nathan went to David fully equipped for the situation, for God had given him a story to tell.

And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich *man* had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor *man* had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man’s lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David’s anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this *thing* shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and be-



cause he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou *art* the man ... (2 Samuel 12:1–7a)

There are four characters in Nathan’s tale: a rich man, a poor man, a lamb, and a traveler. The rich man represents David, the poor man is Uriah, and the lamb is Bathsheba. But who is the fourth character? Who is the traveler?

The traveler is the spirit of lust that drove David to take another man’s wife. Jesus exposed the way of the traveler in Matthew 12:43 when he declared, “When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.” That night on the rooftop, the traveler found rest in the mind of King David.

Remember, in the story told by Nathan, it was not the rich man that dined on lamb that night. Only the traveler was fed. In the tragic story of David, Bathsheba and Uriah, the only one who got any satisfaction out of the arrangement was the spirit of lust. All the other participants – David, Bathsheba, and certainly Uriah – were damaged.

It is a shameful reality that not everything that goes on behind church doors is holy. King David was neither the first man nor the last to misuse the power of his office for personal gratification. But allow me to speak plainly – there is no sin in the church that causes more lasting damage than sexual impropriety amongst her members, and especially when the transgression involves church elders. Individuals, married couples, families, and friends are routinely sacrificed at the altar of the traveler as he pursues his next meal.

How easily David was able to recognize his sin when he thought it belonged to someone else! Such is the hypocrisy of us all. As Jesus said, “Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother’s eye” (Matt. 7:3).

Nathan did not judge David. He spoke the judgment of God. “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel,” he prophesied. God reminded David of all he had done for him, and all he would do.

... I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul; And I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if *that had been* too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. (2 Samuel 12:7b–8)

David had more than he would ever need to satiate his own appetite, but he could not appease the insatiable appetite of his lust. Your lust is never satisfied by what belongs to you. Lust feeds on

what belongs to someone else. But the responsibility of his actions lay squarely on David's shoulders. He could neither blame the one whose body tempted him, nor the spirit of lust that enflamed him. God had provided David with a way of escape, but he had "despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight." From that point forward, he layered sin upon sin. "Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword," said the Lord, "and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon" (v. 9).

The repercussion of sin is more than a shameful memory. The wages of sin is death. David was about to learn the terrible consequence of his transgression.

Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give *them* unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst *it* secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. (vv. 10-12)

All of David's rationalizations and excuses melted away in the righteous fire of God's anger. For the first time, David fully realized what he had done, and he stood naked before God. Verse 13 says, "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD."

It is important to recognize the depth of David's sorrow. This was more than sorrow for getting caught. The heart-wrenching psalm of repentance that he wrote after this incident reveals much about the soul of this man.

Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest. (Psalm 51:1-4)

David said, "I have sinned against the LORD." David was remarkable in that he always accepted full responsibility for his actions. This distinguishes him from most men, including his predecessor King Saul, whose insistence on blaming other people for his own mistakes cost him his throne. But even David's repentance could not save the life of his child. The traveler claimed one more prize.

... And Nathan said unto David, The LORD also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die. Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also *that* is born unto thee shall surely die. (2 Samuel 12:13b–14)

It is an incredible testimony to the mercies and forgiveness of God that David and Bathsheba had another child who was quite remarkable in his own right.

And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him. (v. 24)

Yes, King Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba. And it was Bathsheba, one-time wife of Uriah, who taught her son Solomon (here called “king Lemuel”) the prophecies contained in Proverbs 31, as it is written, “The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him” (v. 1). It was Bathsheba who taught her son about the “virtuous woman,” a metaphor for the Church of Jesus Christ.

### A MINISTRY OF RESTORATION

The Lord sent Nathan on a rescue mission to confront David concerning his sin, and to bring him to repentance. If Nathan had entered this situation with any other agenda than the restoration of David, he would not have succeeded. If you are ever given such a responsibility, you had better be sure that your heart is right with God.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:1–2)

With the sword of the Spirit, coupled with the spirit of meekness and wisdom, you will be able to minister restoration to your fellow Christians, and bring joy to the angels of God.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins. (James 5:19–20)

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:10)

1 Kings 15:5 says that “David did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, and turned not aside from any thing that he commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite.”

If not for the wisdom of Nathan, that one matter would have been enough to negate all of his wonderful accomplishments.

One may wonder why records like the story of David and Bathsheba are found in the Bible at all. God certainly could have “edited” his book, omitting all the sins and misdeeds of his servants, leaving only their remarkable exploits. But Romans 15:4 says, “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.” Let us be wise enough to learn from David’s mistakes. “A reproof entereth more into a wise man,” says Proverbs 17:10, “than an hundred stripes into a fool.”

## 30.

### *THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS*

### BELIEVE NOT EVERY SPIRIT

Every day we are surrounded with evidence of a world that exists beyond the scope of our five senses. Still, many people live their entire lives oblivious to the deeper spiritual realities. They are like men standing on the shoreline looking out to the ocean, only vaguely aware of the vast world that exists below the surface of the water.

The last of the three revelation gifts is the gift of discerning of spirits. This gift is very similar to the gift of the word of knowledge in that both gifts enable Christians to receive revelations from God concerning things that they could not otherwise know. The difference lies in the kind of information received. A word of knowledge pertains to things that belong to the natural, physical realm. A revelation of the discerning of spirits concerns things that belong to the supernatural, spiritual realm. It is by a revelation of the discerning of spirits that we see below the surface of the physical world.

There are many things that affect our lives while remaining invisible to us. For example, we never see the wind. We detect the presence of wind only by its effect on the things it touches. Jesus said that the wind is comparable to spirit in that way.

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

Like wind, spirit is intangible. Spirit cannot be seen, felt, heard, smelled, or tasted. Only the *effects* of spirit are detected by the five senses. We recognize that a man is alive when we see him move, or hear him speak. But what makes him alive? No information gathered by the senses can answer that question. We cannot see, hear, feel, smell, or taste the “spirit of man.” All we can see are the effects it produces. That is why the things of the Spirit of God are indiscernible to the natural man. Such things are not naturally discerned. He cannot know them, says 1 Corinthians 2:14, “because they are spiritually discerned.”

The gift of discerning of spirits makes spirits discernable – knowable – to us. This gift does not enable Christians to see, hear, or smell spirits. The information received by this gift comes by revelation, not by the senses. The revelation makes known what spirit is *behind* the manifestation.

### SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT AND THE DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

Spiritual discernment and the discerning of spirits are two different abilities. Spiritual discernment is wise judgment, the ability to distinguish between good and bad. This is what Solomon asked for when he prayed, “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” (1 Kings 3:9). Spiritual discernment is needed to know the difference between righteousness and wickedness.

Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not. (Malachi 3:18)

An often misinterpreted – and therefore misapplied – precept of Christianity is “Judge not, that ye be not judged” (Matt. 7:1). This statement is often misused to advance the idea that Christians should be entirely accepting of and nonjudgmental towards all manner of lifestyle. Jesus’ statement, “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” must be understood in light of his saying, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Righteous judgment is the judgment of God. It is judgment according to his standards of right and wrong, and not our own.

Jesus taught his disciples to “judge not according to the appearance.” As Isaiah prophesied, Jesus himself did not “judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears” (Isa. 11:3). He judged with wisdom and righteousness. That is why he could say, “I judge, and my judgment is just” (John 5:30).

To lead a fruitful Christian life, we must continually judge between what is holy and unholy, clean and unclean, righteous and wicked. Wise judgments lead to wise choices, and wise choices lead to a fruitful life. That is why spiritual discernment is so vital to our lives.

And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean; (Leviticus 10:10)

Spiritual discernment is the ability to discern good and evil. In comparison, the discerning of spirits is the ability to discern good and evil *spirits*. This gift of discerning of spirits is the ability God gives whereby Christians can receive a revelation from God concerning the source of any spiritual manifestation, whether it is holy or unholy.

### TRY THE SPIRITS WHETHER THEY ARE OF GOD

The spirit world divides into several categories. There are many kinds of spirits. The spirit of the beast gives life to animals, and the spirit of man gives life to human beings. The Spirit of Christ gives a man everlasting life, and the spirit of antichrist leads a man to eternal death. There are holy angels that we should entertain, and unholy spirits that we should avoid. There is the Spirit of God, who is the Holy Spirit. Because there are so many kinds of spirits in the world, God gives us a clear warning: Believe not every spirit.

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

A revelation of the discerning of spirits does more than make known the presence of spirits. We also learn which spirits to believe. This judgment is made according to the source of the spirits – “whether they are of God.” Whether or not a spirit is “of God” can only be learned by a revelation of the discerning of spirits.

Countless men and women are taken captive by the devil because they seek spiritual knowledge without recognizing that all spirits are not to be believed. Spiritual knowledge comes from more than one source. There is wisdom “that is from above” and wisdom that “descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:14,16). Wisdom from above comes from God, the “Father of lights”

(James 1:17). Wisdom from below comes from the devil, the father of lies (see John 8:44).

The difference between the two will rarely be obvious. Most often, the difference is subtle. Remember that the serpent “beguiled Eve through his subtilty” (2 Cor. 11:3). There will be some truth in his words, though the truth will not be in him. In order to deceive, the lie must seem credible. It is the devil’s great ability to present himself as a messenger of truth that makes him such a powerful adversary.

For such *are* false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore *it is* no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (2 Corinthians 11:13–15)

Eve erred when she considered the *logic* of the serpent’s message rather than its *source*. Those who judge the devil’s word on its own merits will always be deceived. We must learn to reject the serpent’s message simply because of its source. It is wisdom from below.

### PROVE ALL THINGS

How does a fish end up in someone’s cooking pan? No fish purposely impales itself on a hook. The fish eats the hook because he only sees the lure. Every successful trap is baited. 1 Thessalonians 5:21 says, “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”

On Paul’s first missionary trip to Europe, he met a woman in Philippi who seemed very appreciative and supportive of his work. As Luke wrote, the woman “followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Verse 16 reveals that this woman was “a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination.” But how did Paul know this was the case? Examine her words for yourself. What did she do or say that showed Paul that she was possessed by an unclean spirit?

The fact is, her message was absolutely true. Paul and his fellow missionaries were indeed “the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.” Perhaps this is why Paul did not immediately recognize the trap the devil was laying for him. Verse 18 begins, “This she did many days.” But Paul tested the source of the message. He turned to God for a revelation of the discerning of spir-



its, and learned the truth of the situation. This same verse concludes, “But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”

This woman was indeed a prophet, but a *false* prophet. Her information did not come from the Father of lights, but from a spirit of divination. Only by a revelation of the discerning of spirits could Paul know the source of her message.

God warns his people of “false prophets” and “false teachers” (2 Pet. 2:1). He warns us of “false Christs” and “false apostles” (Matt. 24:24 and 2 Cor. 11:3); of “false brethren” and “false accusers” (Gal. 2:4 and 2 Tim. 3:3). How do so many deceivers and liars find their way into our churches? They are *invited!* Unwitting pastors, enticed by the lofty words they hear or the great wonders they see, invite these “wolves in sheep’s clothing” to address their congregation. Half a year later they wonder why all their sheep have been consumed.

Jesus said, “Signs shall follow them that believe” (Mark 16:17). Signs are to follow us; we are not to follow after signs. God himself will prove us concerning this point.

If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)

Remember, the message of the false prophetess of Philippi was indeed true. But Paul did not just prove one or two things. He proved all things. This is something we must all do if we are going to successfully run the race of faith.



## 31.

*THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS*

### THE WORKS OF THE FLESH

When faced with the challenge of solving a crime, police detectives collect evidence from the crime scene, in the hope that it will lead them to the one responsible for the wrongdoing. Witnesses are interviewed, and material is collected for later analysis. But sometimes there is not enough physical evidence to identify the criminal. In that case, the investigators search for *circumstantial* evidence. Circumstantial evidence is *implied* evidence. For instance, say that a business owner called the police to report that money was stolen from his vault. To catch the thief in the act would be the best evidence against him. But if one of his employees unexpectedly went on a wild spending spree, paying cash for expensive cars and jewelry, the circumstantial evidence would point to him.

A detective relies on the analysis of the evidence to determine the identity of the criminal. However, there is no guarantee that this analysis will be correct. Evidence can be misleading. Perhaps that employee inherited a large sum of money from a distant relative.

Just as a crime is a sin against the laws of the land, a sin is a crime against the laws of God. In order to discover who is responsible for the crime, the criminal must be identified. That is the purpose of the gift of discerning of spirits. By this gift, the culprit is detected, not

by analysis, but by revelation. Information gained by the gift of discerning of spirits is always correct because it is received from God.

Imagine that a man came to you for counseling saying, "I know the difference between right and wrong. I know the right thing to do, and I want to do the right thing. But even though I start out to do the right thing, I end up doing something evil, the very thing I hate." How many Christians would immediately blame Satan for this man's troubles? How many would lay hands upon him, and start rebuking the devil?

Evidence can be misleading, and analysis can be wrong. The troubled person I described was none other than Paul the apostle. Paul was *not* possessed by devils when he confessed, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). Paul knew that the cause of his problem was not unclean spirits, but "the sin that dwelleth in me."

Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but *how* to perform that which is good I find not. (Romans 7:17-18)

The presence of evil in the life of a Christian does not necessitate the presence of evil spirits. Paul was writing about the fruit of sin, the carnal nature that is in man because of Adam's transgression. "Now if I do that I would not," he continued, "it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (v. 20).

We cannot lean upon methods of analysis to detect the presence of devils. If we do, we will be wrong time and again, and we will do more harm than good. That is why we need the gift of discerning of spirits. Only then will we discover the root of the problem.

### THE WORKS OF THE FLESH DEFINED

The Bible makes a clear distinction between the works of darkness and the works of the flesh. Again, every thing is "after its kind." That which is of the flesh is flesh, and that which is of the spirit is spirit. The works of the flesh are the fruit of sin, not evil spirits. The devil encourages such behavior, but does not cause it. The fifth chapter of Galatians lists seventeen "works of the flesh."

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings,

and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19–20)

Romans 6:19 says, “Yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.” In the listing of the “works of the flesh,” the first four violate the call to chastity, or moral purity. “Adultery” is marital infidelity, and “fornication” refers to sexual relations outside of marriage. “Uncleanness” is obscenity, and “lasciviousness” is lustfulness. Hebrews 13:4 says, “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” Outside the sanctuary of covenant, the act of love is degraded.

We are to be faithful in our marriage to Christ as well. “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy,” wrote Paul, “for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2). The next two “works of the flesh” are idolatry and witchcraft, sins that violate the call to godliness, or spiritual chastity. “Idolatry” is the worship of false gods. “Witchcraft” is the practice of sorcery and enchantments. These are acts of spiritual fornication.

Romans 13:10 says, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.” The next nine “works of the flesh” violate the call to love your neighbor as yourself. “Hatred” is enmity, the opposite of love. “Variance” is disagreement that produces tension and strife. “Emulation” is rivalry for favor or honor. “Wrath” is violent anger. “Strife” is contention for superiority. “Sedition” is behavior or language meant to incite rebelliousness. “Heresies” are fundamental errors of doctrine. “Envyng” is discomfort at the superior condition or happiness of another. “Murder” is the act of unlawfully killing a human being with premeditated malice.

1 Corinthians 9:25 says, “Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” The final two in the list of the “works of the flesh” violate the call to temperance. “Drunkenness” is the loss of sobriety due to alcohol. “Revellings” are wild, noisy parties characterized by public drunkenness and unbridled revelry.

Just as the Ten Commandments enhance man’s relationship with God, himself, and his neighbor, the works of the flesh impair those relationships. The works of the flesh are sins against God, yourself, and your neighbor. They are the complete antithesis of the great commandments, to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength,” and to “love thy neighbour as thyself” (Mark 12:30–31).

People, not evil spirits, carry out the works of the flesh. True, Satan and his angels stand by as cheerleaders and instigators. But just as the devil could not force Adam and Eve to disobey God, neither can he force you to commit the crimes of the flesh. The devil can only encourage you to succumb to the unholy instincts of the carnal man.

### LET NOT SIN REIGN IN YOUR MORTAL BODY

A man once asked me to pray for him that he would no longer sin. I told him if he had that kind of faith, he should pray for me! But that is not the way it works. It is the responsibility of every Christian to depart from iniquity, and purge himself of the things that take room from God. It is by the things we allow and deny in our life that the Lord “knoweth them that are his.”

Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

(2 Timothy 2:19)

You cannot sit in mud and expect to stay clean. Iniquity will depart from you when you depart from iniquity. All the while you've been waiting on the Lord to purge you of uncleanness, he's been waiting on you to purge yourself.

If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, *and* prepared unto every good work. (v. 21)

You show yourself fit for the Lord's service when you deny sin the place it wants in your life.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. (Romans 6:12)

Not God, not the devil; you alone decide if sin will govern your life. You either *let* sin reign or you *let not* sin reign in your mortal body. Your decision will hinge upon the kind of freedom you most desire. Yes, John 8:32 says, “The truth shall make you free.” But remember, we were all quite free before we met the Lord.

For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness. (Romans 6:20)

Righteousness had no hold on us before we were saved. We were free from it. Clearly, not all freedom is to be desired! What some people call freedom is more correctly termed lawlessness.

What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being

made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life. (vv. 21–22)

As Moses said to the Pharaoh, so said Jesus to the prince of darkness, “Thus saith the LORD, Let my people go, that they may serve me.” Once you were free from righteousness. Now you are made free from sin. As a free man, it is up to you to decide whether God or sin reigns in your life. Your deeds, not your words, reveal your chosen master.

### NEITHER GIVE PLACE TO THE DEVIL.

The truth is, many people do not really want deliverance from sin. What they want is a way to justify their sinful behavior. They want someone or something else to blame. If it is not their fault, it is not their responsibility. If it is not their responsibility, then they do not need to change. Some people blame genetics. “This is just the way I am!” Others blame their parents, their siblings, their childhood, their teachers, their friends, their spouses, their pastors, or their government leaders. I am sure that somebody somewhere blames all their problems on their dog.

Many Christians like to blame their problems on the devil. Their theologies are highly devil-centric, perpetuating the notion that Satan is omnipresent and omnipotent. But understand this: The devil is not the problem. Sin is the problem. If Satan has gained entrance into your life, it is because your sin handed him the key.

The devil cannot *take* a place in your life. You have to make room for him, and give him a place. Every wayward thought you do not cast down, and every sin you make allowance for does just that.

Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4:25–27)

When I was a young man, most of the trouble I fell into was at the encouragement of my friends. I often returned the favor to them as well. We can give the devil a place in our life through the people we associate with. 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Evil communications [companionships] corrupt good manners.” Some friendships do more harm than good. This is not the biblical ideal. A good friend helps you stay on the right path.

Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. (Proverbs 27:17)

When you decide to change your life for Christ, don't be surprised if your old friends discourage your efforts. People who do not want to change do not want their friends to change either.

Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with *them* to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of *you* ... (1 Peter 4:4)

Keeping the faith is hard enough without the continual opposition of someone who is amused (at best) or offended (at worst) by your religion. It is for our own wellbeing and peace of mind that we are instructed to refrain from entering into a covenant with an unbeliever.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

There is a big difference between reaching out to the lost, and losing your way among them. Of course, we cannot be so afraid of contamination that we cut ourselves off from the very society we hope to evangelize. Moreover, if we intend to avoid all sinners, we will need to find another planet to inhabit.

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. (1 Corinthians 5:9-10)

When Jesus prayed for his disciples, he said, "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil" (John 17:15). Though we live in the world, we must remember that we are not of the world. "They are not of the world," said Jesus, "even as I am not of the world" (v. 16).

When we live according to the precepts of God, and accept the responsibility to look after our sins instead of looking for someone to blame, we can enjoy the good life that God has prepared for us. You and I would never dream of setting a place for the devil at our dinner table. Let us "neither give place to the devil" anywhere in our lives.



## 32.

### THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS

### THE WORKS OF DARKNESS

Fear is caused by ignorance. Many people are terrified of the devil because of things they have heard in ghost stories, or seen in horror movies. They think his power is limitless. They think his nature is reckless. They are wrong on both accounts.

Paul wrote, “I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3). This verse teaches us much about Satan’s mission, his method, and his limitations. His *mission* is to turn your thoughts away “from the simplicity that is in Christ.” His *method* is to beguile you through his subtlety. But his power is *limited* to persuasion.

God will not allow Satan to overwhelm you. You will never “be tempted above that ye are able” to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). This leaves the devil only one option. He must convince you that forsaking God is a good idea. Of course, forsaking God is a ridiculous notion. Why would anyone choose to disbelieve God, who tells only the truth, and believe instead the “father of lies”? It is rather amazing that the devil has been so consistently able to accomplish his goal.

Most people expect to see Satan manifest himself in bold, outrageous ways, yet that has never been his style. His way is subtle. He

does not want to frighten you so badly that you will run to God for help. He does not want to draw you into a fight. He just wants to take you for a walk, away from the path of the just, and into the way of the wicked.

2 Corinthians 2:11 says, “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.” It is not the *power* of Satan that defeats us; it is his *wiles*, his cunning craftiness, and his trickery. That is why we are told, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). Without the gift of discerning of spirits, we will be continually fooled.

### DOCTRINES OF DEVILS

One device that Satan employs to lure the children of God away from “the simplicity that is in Christ” is called “doctrines of devils.”

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils .... (1 Timothy 4:1)

Once again, Satan’s mission, method, and limitations are exposed. He cannot simply pull Christians off the path of righteousness. He must persuade them to leave the way of truth in favor of a different way. Seducing spirits coax the children of light into the shadows. Doctrines of devils keep them there.

I again remind you that Jesus spoke of those who worshipped him in vain, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). Doctrines of devils do not necessarily promote devil worship. The devil’s manner is subtle; he is content to settle for anything but truth. A fable will do just fine.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. (2 Timothy 4:3–4)

Even in Paul’s day, the mere mention of the word “science” was enough to cause some men to abandon their faith. True science aligns with the Bible; “science falsely so called” does not.

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane *and* vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: Which some professing have erred concerning the faith. Grace *be* with thee. Amen. (1 Timothy 6:20–21)

Satan does not have to be personally present in order to accomplish his evil work. In the parable of the tares, Jesus said, “But while

men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way” (Matt. 13:25). The “tares” that the devil sows are false doctrines. Evil doctrines carry men away from truth. Hebrews 13:9 warns, “Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.” Likewise, Ephesians 4:14 admonishes, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”

Like superstitions, doctrines of devils have more power than Satan himself. You cannot cast an idea out of someone. Only sound teaching can root out false beliefs.

### THE ABOMINATIONS OF THOSE NATIONS

The book of Deuteronomy is the record of “the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness” (Deut. 1:1), “in the fortieth year in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month” (v. 3). The forty-year period the Israelites had been condemned to wander the desert wilderness was now over. Except for Moses, Joshua and Caleb, all the Israelites who were “twenty years and upward” on the day Moses first tried to lead them into the Promised Land were dead.

For the second time, Moses prepared the Children of Israel to cross the Jordan River. He reminded them of all they had experienced since their escape from Egypt, and the reason they had been condemned to wander for forty years. He also reminded them that the same giants that had terrified their forefathers were still occupying the land of Canaan. Would this new generation turn and run like their fathers before them? Or would they finally rise up to the charge first given forty-two years previously?

Then I said unto you, Dread not, neither be afraid of them. The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes; And in the wilderness, where thou hast seen how that the LORD thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went, until ye came into this place. (Deuteronomy 1:29–31)

“And it shall be, when ye are come nigh unto the battle,” Moses said, “let not your hearts faint, fear not, and do not tremble, neither be ye terrified because of them” (Deut. 20:2–3). Paul spoke similar words to New Testament believers ready to enter their own Promised Land when he exhorted them to be “in nothing terrified by your adversaries” (Phil. 1:28).

The Promised Land was inhabited by “the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou” (Deut. 7:1). God spent little time telling the Israelites about these nations. All that the Israelites needed to know was that God wanted them destroyed. “And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee,” said Moses, “thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them” (v. 2). The Israelites were not to allow the pagan nations to infiltrate their families physically or spiritually, under threat of dire consequence.

Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. (vv. 3-4)

No altar or graven image was to be left standing. No pagan religion or practice was to be tolerated. “When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee,” Moses said, “thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations” (Deut. 18:9).

The works of the flesh are the sins of carnal man. The works of darkness are the fruit of man’s fellowship with spiritual darkness. A list of nine “abominations” gives examples of these vile acts.

There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. (vv. 10-11).

First on the list of these “abominations” was a wicked ritual that forced children to “pass through the fire.” Leviticus 18:21 says that children were made to “pass through the fire to Molech.” In 1 Kings 11:7, Molech is called “the abomination of the children of Ammon.” He was worshipped in ceremonies of child sacrifice. Unthinkably, King Solomon built a temple to Molech on the Mount of Olives, “the hill that is before Jerusalem,” to please his pagan wives.

*Divination* is the satanic art of foretelling the future by the interpretation of omens, or by information given by evil spirits. We know that Paul encountered “a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination” in Philippi (Acts 16:16). In Ezekiel 21:21, the “king of Babylon” practiced divination in three ways: “he made his arrows bright, he

consulted with images, he looked in the liver.” The “prophets” of the Maasai, called the *laibon*, practice divination the same way, by examining the entrails of sacrificed animals.

An *observer of times* is one who looks to the stars and planets for guidance. Isaiah foretold the ruin of those who trust in such futility.

Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from *these things* that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: *there shall not be* a coal to warm at, *nor* fire to sit before it.

(Isaiah 47:13–14)

An *enchanter* is a sorcerer. The magicians of Pharaoh’s court used enchantments in their attempt to duplicate the miracles done by Aaron.

Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods.

(Exodus 7:11–12)

When Nahum prophesied of the destruction of Ninevah, he called her “the mistress of witchcrafts.”

Because of the multitude of the whoredoms of the wellfavoured harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her whoredoms, and families through her witchcrafts.

(Nahum 3:4)

A *witch* is a woman who casts spells in order to influence people or events. Sorcerers and witches routinely use hallucinogenic drugs to enhance their powers and to stimulate their visions. (The ancient Greeks used the word *pharmakeia* for both witchcraft and sorcery. This word is also the basis of the English word *pharmacy*, or apothecary). Witches rely on articles of jewelry called amulets or fetishes to harness the powers of magic. Similarly, a *charmer* claims the ability to bind a curse or a blessing onto its object by tying special knots or charms.

A *consulter with familiar spirits* is a medium; one who professes to gather information from spirits of the dead who are familiar with the troubles of those they left behind. Doctrines of devils have spawned the belief that there are souls in heaven who can guide the living. This, of course, is not the truth of the Word of God. Ecclesiastes 9:5

says, “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing.” The Bible gives stern warning to those who seek the counsel of familiar spirits.

Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I *am* the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:31)

Perhaps the loudest warning comes from the tragic example of King Saul.

So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD, *even* against the word of the LORD, which he kept not, and also for asking *counsel of one that had* a familiar spirit, to enquire *of it*; And enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse. (1 Chronicles 10:13–14)

Knowing that Saul himself had once “put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land” (1 Sam. 28:3), this record becomes even more tragic. As Proverbs 26:11 says, “As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly.”

A *wizard* is a male witch who is also used by familiar spirits. Isaiah 8:19 says, “When they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?”

A *necromancer* is similar to a consulter with familiar spirits, the difference being that a necromancer invites spirits to possess him, so that he becomes a channel for them to speak through.

## KEEP YOURSELVES FROM THE ACCURSED THING

Darkness defiles all those who fellowship therein. That is why the works of darkness and the people who use them are *both* abominations to the Lord.

For all that do these things *are* an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. (Deuteronomy 18:12)

We are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11). In the Old Testament and in the New, God’s people are commanded to forsake the works of darkness, and touch no unclean thing.

Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean *thing*; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD. (Isaiah 52:11)

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. (2 Corinthians 6:17–18)

The works of darkness defile not only the individual who communes with them, but the entire fellowship of believers as well. This is well proven by the story of Achan, in the book of Joshua. As Joshua prepared his army to enter Jericho, he warned his soldiers not to bring any of the religious artifacts of Jericho home with them.

And ye, in any wise keep *yourselves* from the accursed thing, lest ye make *yourselves* accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. (Joshua 6:18)

A man of Judah named Achan disobeyed Joshua's command and "took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel" (Josh. 7:1). Soon afterwards, the soldiers of Ai defeated the Israelites in battle. When Joshua sought the Lord for the cause of the defeat, the Lord said, "There is an accursed thing in the midst of thee, O Israel: thou canst not stand before thine enemies, until ye take away the accursed thing from among you" (Josh. 7:13). Because of the severity of Achan's sin, God ordered his entire household put to death and all his possessions burned. One man's transgression afflicted the entire congregation.

We live in a day when Christians everywhere talk of the need for spiritual revival. Unfortunately, many church leaders are trying to stir up the spirit by whipping up the emotions. A typical worship service consists of elaborate musical productions and sophisticated dance routines. Hymns of praise and joy that have graced the church for hundreds of years have been replaced with love songs for Jesus, short on substance and long on sentiment. An increasingly small portion of time is set aside for the preaching of the Word of God. Even then, the messages are entertaining, self-serving, and "smooth."

There is a great difference between revival and excitement. Excitement is thrilling to the senses. Revival is enriching to the soul. Excitement can be generated by any activity that accelerates the heart rate. Revival comes when people forsake their wicked ways, and turn their hearts to God.

The church has opted for excitement when what she needs is revival. True revival begins with forsaking the unclean works of darkness. This is how the great revival in Josiah's day was born.

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

Moreover the *workers with familiar spirits*, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD. (2 Kings 23:24)

Likewise, the great revival in Ephesus began when the people renounced the unclean thing, and turned to God.

And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all *men*: and they counted the price of them, and found *it* fifty thousand *pieces* of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. (Acts 19:18-20)

The Word of God will never prevail in our world until it first prevails in our hearts. We must determine to keep ourselves from the accursed thing, and put away doctrines of devils and works of darkness. Only then we will see the spiritual revival we have been praying for.



*THE GIFT OF DISCERNING OF SPIRITS*

## THE POWER OF DARKNESS

My wife Nelly was born in Oaxaca, Mexico, of a Hispanic mother and father. I was born in the United States, of a Caucasian father and Japanese mother. As a result, our sons share a Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian heritage. Over the years most of our family traditions have become Americanized, but one Mexican tradition we still enjoy is the breaking of a *piñata*. A piñata is a brightly decorated vessel made of cardboard and paper maché that is filled with candy and suspended in the air by a rope. The fun begins when, one by one, children who have been blindfolded and spun around to disorient them, try to break the piñata open with a large stick. As you can imagine, there is far more beating of the air than of the piñata!

Before anyone can cast out a devil, a devil must be present. We can cry out all day long, “You foul spirit! Come out in the name of Jesus Christ!” But if our problems are caused by doctrines of devils or sins we have not forsaken, we will simply beat the air like a child swinging at a piñata. That is not the way to war a good warfare! “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly,” said Paul, “so fight I, not as one that beateth the air” (1 Cor. 9:26). As we walk according to the revelations we receive by the gift of discerning of spirits, we can follow the apostle’s example.

NEITHER IGNORANT, NOR OBSESSED

In studying the powers of darkness, it is important to keep a proper perspective. The Israelites were to be aware of their enemies, but they were not to be overly concerned with learning about them. The outcome of their battles was never determined by their knowledge of the enemy, but by their obedience to God.

The “seven nations greater and mightier than thou” symbolize the principalities, powers, and rulers of the darkness of this world with which Christians must contend. Yes, they are strong in number and might, yes, they are cunning in the ways of war. But those who are strong in him, God has “made them stronger than their enemies” (Ps. 105:24)!

Satan triumphs equally over those who deny his existence and those who see him everywhere. It is the latter kind who do the most damage in the church. Like the ten spies who brought an evil report of the Promised Land, they give fearful reports of satanic confederacy here, there, and yonder. They sow paranoia and confusion in the church, especially among novice believers whose ignorance of spiritual matters makes them vulnerable to such prattle. They claim to be uniquely gifted in spiritual warfare, yet almost inevitably, their own life is in shambles. (This, they explain, is the price of fighting on the “front lines.”) They are held captive by their imagination, led by hallucinations and not revelation from God. Sadly, their pride in being “special” keeps them from seeking the deliverance they so desperately need.

My friend Evan Pyle tells this story: “A skilled gardener planted his annual vegetable garden. He was skilled because he had been taught by his father, who had gardened for many years and always managed to have a successful garden. This gardener wanted a better garden than his father and so he carefully cultivated, fertilized, and planted his garden. But when the delicate seedlings sprouted, he noticed some insects in the area. He became very concerned that the insects would attack and damage his plants. In fact, he was so concerned that he became obsessed with the insects. He walked through his garden trying to rid it of the insects. In his obsession over the insects, he did not notice that he was stepping all over his new seedling plants. The more he focused on destroying those insects, the more he was actually destroying the plants he was trying to cultivate.” Evan concludes his story, “Experienced gardeners will tell you that the best defense against invading insects is to grow strong and healthy plants.”

## PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS

We have considered both the works of the flesh, and the works of darkness. Now we are ready to examine what the Bible says about the principalities, the powers, and the rulers of darkness in this world, all mentioned in Ephesians 6:12.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*.  
(Ephesians 6:12)

In the Bible, *high places* are places of worship, sometimes godly but most often idolatrous. Psalm 78:58 says, "For they provoked him [God] to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images." Satan's main interest is the spread of idolatrous religion, "spiritual wickedness in high places." Keep in mind that his victories are only possible when people turn their backs on God.

In the New Testament, the word *principality* or *principalities* is always joined with the word *powers*. In Ephesians, these words refer to the government of heaven.

To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God .... (Ephesians 3:10)

In Colossians, they speak of the governments of both heaven and earth.

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether *they be* thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him .... (Colossians 1:16)

In Titus, the principalities and powers are of the earthly realm.

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work ....  
(Titus 3:1)

In Romans 8:38, Ephesians 6:12, and Colossians 2:15, the principalities and powers refer to the realm of darkness. In Romans 8:38, the principalities and powers are contrasted with the angels of God, in the same way that life is contrasted with death, and things to come with things present.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come .... (Romans 8:38)

Colossians 2:15 speaks of Christ's triumph over the entire satanic kingdom.

*And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.* (Colossians 2:15)

Twice the Scriptures state that Jesus is above *all* principality and power, in every realm.

Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come .... (Ephesians 1:21)

And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power .... (Colossians 2:10)

### PRINCIPALITIES AND PRINCES

A *principality* is a territory under the authority of a prince. For example, the small country of Liechtenstein, nestled between Austria and Switzerland, is a principality. At the time of this writing, the ruler of the principality of Liechtenstein is Prince Hans-Adam II.

The heads of the tribes of Israel were also called princes. Numbers 34:18 says, "And ye shall take one prince of every tribe, to divide the land by inheritance." Each prince governed a principality, or territory of land.

The prophet Daniel called the archangel Michael "the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people" (Dan. 12:1). Michael's principality is in heaven, where he is "one of the chief princes" (Dan. 10:13).

In one of the most famous prophecies in the Bible, Isaiah called the Son of God the Prince of Peace. "For unto us a child is born," says Isaiah 9:6, "unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." Daniel spoke prophetically of Jesus as "the Prince of princes" (Dan. 8:25), and "Messiah the Prince" (9:25). Peter called Jesus "the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15), and "a Prince and a Saviour" (5:31). John the Revelator called Jesus "the prince of the kings of the earth" (Rev. 1:5).

There are principalities of heaven and earth. But there is one more region to be considered, and that is the kingdom of darkness, ruled by Satan. The Pharisees and scribes called him Beelzebub, "the prince of the devils" (Matt. 9:34; 12:24; Mark 3:22). Jesus said that some people called Beelzebub "the master of the house."

It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more *shall they call* them of his household? (Matthew 10:25)

Jesus referred to Satan as “the prince of this world.” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:1). Paul referred to him as “the god of this world [that] hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2 Cor. 4:4). Of course, the phrase “of this world” must be understood within the greater context of the Bible. Satan is not lord over all the earth. Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.” Daniel 4:17 records King Nebuchadnezzar’s great revelation of the Almighty, “that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.”

Satan is the prince of *this* world. The world in which we live, this present age, is called “the evil day” in Ephesians 6:13. We shine as lights in the world “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,” says Philippians 2:15. But this day will soon be over, and a new day will dawn, “the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ” (Rom. 2:16). Until that day arrives, Satan is free to try to wreak havoc in the lives of men, for he is “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2).

### KINDS OF EVIL SPIRITS

It is surprising to find honor among thieves. It is also surprising to find government among the spirits of darkness. But do not imagine committee meetings and discussion groups. Picture instead a pack of wolves that will cooperate for the sake of the hunt. Status within the pack is based upon strength alone. There are some spirits even more wicked than others.

Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation. (Matthew 12:45)

A desperate father brought his possessed young son to Jesus. An evil spirit was doing great harm to this boy. “Wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away,” said the father (Mark 9:18). “And oftentimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him” (v. 22). The

disciples of Jesus, though they were not strangers to the deliverance ministry, had not been able to help him.

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, *Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him* And *the spirit* cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. (Mark 9:25–27)

When the disciples were alone with Jesus, they asked him, “Why could not we cast him out?” (v. 28). Jesus answered, “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting” (v. 29). These two words – *this kind* – tell us that there are different kinds of evil spirits. In verse 25, Jesus identified this spirit as a “dumb and deaf spirit.”

In the country of the Gadarenes, Jesus commanded a devil to identify itself.

And [the evil spirit] cried with a loud voice, and said, What have I to do with thee, Jesus, *thou* Son of the most high God? I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not. For he said unto him, Come out of the man, *thou* unclean spirit. And he asked him, What *is* thy name? And he answered, saying, My name *is* Legion: for we are many. (Mark 5:7–9)

It is significant that of the many Gospel accounts in which Jesus cast out devils, this is the only recorded account in which Jesus asked a devil to give its name. Knowing what kind of evil spirit you are facing is not essential to casting it out. The Israelites did not need to ask, “Now, are you a Hittite or a Hivite?” before they drove the pagans out of the land of Canaan.

In the vast majority of biblical testimonies of deliverance from evil, devils are simply referred to as “unclean spirits.” That being said, many kinds of evil spirits *are* named in the Bible.

The spirit of *antichrist* works in people to reject the message of Christ and salvation. In order to accept Christ, one must first accept his need for salvation. He must acknowledge that he is a sinner. This is something the antichrist spirit is loath to let him do. It was an anti-christ spirit that convinced Cain that, unlike his brother Abel, he did not need to present a sacrifice on his behalf. He offered the work of his own hands instead. Today, this same spirit is behind the “New Age” message of “seeing the Christ in every man.”

And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come

in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. (1 John 4:3)

The spirit of *bondage* works to prevent Christians from accepting the liberty they have in Christ.

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. (Romans 8:15)

And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage ... (Galatians 2:4)

The spirits of *error* and *perversion* cause people to err through misinformation.

We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:6)

The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken *man* staggereth in his vomit. (Isaiah 19:14)

The spirit of *jealousy* works to ensnare a man in wicked imaginations, driving him to rage and destruction.

For jealousy *is* the rage of a man: therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. (Proverbs 6:34)

The spirit of *whoredoms* seduces people to commit idolatry.

My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them: for the spirit of whoredoms hath caused *them* to err, and they have gone a whoring from under their God. (Hosea 4:12)

The spirit of *slumber* works to put people to sleep concerning spiritual matters.

(According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day. (Romans 11:8)

His watchmen *are* blind: they are all ignorant, they *are* all dumb dogs, they cannot bark; sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber. (Isaiah 56:10)

Some spirits try to *influence* while others seek *control*. Picture a man traveling down the road in his automobile with an evil spirit on-board. If that evil spirit is sitting in the backseat trying to convince him

to turn right when he knows to turn left, it is trying to *influence* him. But if that man is sitting in the backseat and the evil spirit is driving the car, it has *possessed* him.

The gift of discerning of spirits makes a Christian able to “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). The “trying” or testing must be done according to revelation from God. We dare not lean to our own understanding in a matter of such importance. We do not want to beat the air.

### RESIST THE DEVIL

As 1 Peter 5:8 says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” One would be foolish indeed to ignore such a fierce enemy. At the same time, there is a great difference between vigilance and trepidation. We have no reason to fear. No matter how powerful our enemy, our God is stronger still. “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

As we have seen so many times already, obedience to God is our key to victory. The best way – the only way – to resist the devil is to submit to God.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded. (James 4:7–8)

In a later chapter, we will learn more about the power that God gives his children to rebuke the powers of darkness, the “power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (Luke 10:19). For now, our emphasis has been on the revelation gift of discerning of spirits, the means by which we can “try the spirits to know whether they are of God.”



## 34.

### THE REVELATION GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

## VISIONS AND REVELATIONS OF THE LORD

“What man is he that feareth the LORD?” asks Psalm 25:12. “Him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.” This truth is very applicable in understanding the revelation gifts of the Spirit. A revelation from God is an unveiling of a secret that he chooses to disclose, in the manner he chooses to disclose it. *What* God reveals and *how* he reveals it is entirely at his discretion.

All revelations are not communicated the same way. In Matthew 12:25 the Bible says, “And Jesus knew their thoughts.” There is no reason to believe that he received this information in a vision. A revelation is often a moment of new insight. Surely you know the blessed experience of receiving new light on a familiar verse. Though you have read it many times before, it is as if you are seeing it for the first time. When you first realized that Jesus Christ was your Savior, this understanding was not necessarily the result of a vision. Very often God communicates to man in a “still small voice.”

And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; *but* the LORD *was* not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; *but* the LORD *was* not in the earthquake:

And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. (1 Kings 19:11–12)

It is the revelation itself that is of primary importance and not the way it is communicated. Inordinate regard for visions and those who receive them is a sure invitation to trouble for the church. At least as many visions are born in the imagination of man as are sent from heaven. For every true revelator, there are scores of people who claim (as did the false prophets of Israel), “I have dreamed, I have dreamed” (Jer. 23:25). Proverbs 24:14 says, “Whoso boasteth himself of a false gift is like clouds and wind without rain.”

Whether by prayer or by fasting, no one can induce visions from God. This is not to say that men have not tried. Throughout the ages and cultures, religious mystics have relied on hallucinogenic drugs to pry open what one author called the “doors of perception.” The drugs indeed produce visions, but these are not holy visions.

The gifts of the Spirit do not enable you to receive revelations and visions “on demand.” Do not be burdened by such unscriptural expectations. Your usefulness to God is determined by your obedience to him, not by the visions you see. The Bible bears record that most of the people who have seen visions from God were not looking for them at the time. If visions from God were a mark of spiritual prowess, there would not be so many Scriptural records of unsaved or ungodly people who saw them. Do you remember when Belshazzar saw the writing on the wall? What was God’s message to this rebellious king? “God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it” (Dan. 5:26). This vision was to Belshazzar’s condemnation, not his praise! Seeing a vision does no more to make a man holy than does owning a Bible. Do not allow yourself to be persuaded otherwise. This being said, we are now ready to examine some of the numerous occasions when the Lord revealed secrets to his servants through visions.

### VISIONS OF THE NIGHT

Christian or not, most people have visions on a regular, nightly basis. We call these visions *dreams*. All dreams are visions, though not all are heavenly sent. Ecclesiastes 5:3 speaks of the kind of dreams that “cometh through the multitude of business,” the fruit of a preoccupied mind. A revelation of the discerning of spirits is needed to know whether the dream was born of the spirit of man or the Spirit of God.

Some of the most frequently recorded visions in the Bible are

“night visions.” A night vision is a vision from God that is communicated to you in your sleep, in your dreams.

For God speaketh once, yea twice, *yet man* perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction ... (Job 33:14–16)

The book of Daniel testifies of many visions that were revealed to the prophet in dreams.

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream and visions of his head upon his bed: then he wrote the dream, *and* told the sum of the matters. Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night ... (Daniel 7:1–2a)

Daniel showed *practical* wisdom when he wrote down his dream upon awakening. Perhaps he remembered the problem that Nebuchadnezzar faced when the king forgot his dream. As seen previously, the mysterious vision seen by the king of Babylon was described to him as “thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed” (Dan. 2:28). The interpretation of this vision was also communicated in a dream, for “the secret was revealed unto Daniel in a night vision” (v. 19). We have also learned how “the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee” (1 Kings 3:5).

The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph of Nazareth three times; on each occasion it was in a night vision. First, “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 1:20). Later, “the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him” (Matt. 2:13). Finally, “when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child’s life” (vv. 19–20).

The apostle Paul was summoned to preach the Gospel in Europe by a dream known famously as “the Macedonian call.”

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gather-

ing that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. (Acts 16:9–10)

While Paul was in Corinth, the Lord spoke to him in a night vision with a message of exhortation and comfort.

Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:9–11)

### VISIONS OF THE DAY

Another kind of vision occurs while the recipient is fully awake. I have noticed that some people who attend my seminars seem especially prone to them. So long as these visions last, I am non-existent to them, despite my best efforts to hold their attention. These visions are commonly called *daydreams*. Just like dreams in the night, most daydreams are born on earth and not in heaven. In the Bible, a vision by day is called a *trance*. In the book of Numbers, we read that Balaam had a vision of the Almighty while he was in a trance.

He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, *which* saw the vision of the Almighty, falling *into a trance*, but having his eyes open ... (Numbers 24:16)

Today, the word “trance” has a rather sinister connotation. We use this word to describe the state of surrender practiced by spiritualists trying to contact familiar spirits. But there is no dark implication in its biblical usage. The word simply means a vivid dream while one is still awake. Peter had this experience while on a rooftop in Joppa.

I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. (Acts 11:5–6)

Paul had an experience like this in Jerusalem.

And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. (Acts 22:17–18)

As we compare this vision with the dream Paul had in Corinth,

we can surmise that Paul would have left Corinth prematurely, and stayed in Jerusalem too long had he been left to his own devices. How wonderful is the Lord to guide his people!

Paul's vision of glory, recorded in 2 Corinthians 12, was also a day vision.

It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. (2 Corinthians 12:1-4)

As he recounted this vision, Paul twice said, "Whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell." Paul did not awake from this vision as from a dream. Every sensual indicator in his body told him he *experienced* it. This event was so vivid to him that he was never sure if God brought him to paradise or brought paradise to him. That is what it is like to have a vision from God.

### THE TIME OF THE END

The first precept of biblical study is to shun private interpretation of the Scriptures. This truth is also fundamental to our understanding of visions. A vision from the Lord is often shrouded in symbolism; God alone holds the key to its interpretation. The only way to know its correct meaning is to receive further revelation. We must curtail the evil tendency to jump to conclusions regarding things revealed symbolically.

Seest thou a man *that is* hasty in his words? *there is* more hope of a fool than of him. (Proverbs 29:20)

There is no profit in error, no matter the surety with which it is spoken. Learn to wait upon the Lord in silence. He will instruct you in all that you need to know. On one occasion, God sent the angel Gabriel to help Daniel know the meaning of a mysterious vision.

And it came to pass, when I, *even I* Daniel, had seen the vision, and sought for the meaning, then, behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between *the banks of Ulai*, which called, and said, Gabriel, make this *man* to understand the vision. So he came near where I stood: and when he came, I was afraid, and fell upon my face:

but he said unto me, Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end *shall be* the vision. Now as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep on my face toward the ground: but he touched me, and set me upright. (Daniel 8:15-18)

But – and this point could not be more emphatic – even Daniel was not given the interpretation to all the visions that he saw. There were some visions he was simply to record.

But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, *even* to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased. (Daniel 12:4)

In a day long ago God said to his people, “Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream” (Num. 12:6). But today, “the time of the end” is upon us. We are living in the “last days” spoken of by Joel and Peter.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (Acts 2:17)

In many ways these last days will be a time when the desire of Moses comes to pass.

And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD’S people were prophets, *and* that the LORD would put his spirit upon them! (Numbers 11:29)

But as 2 Timothy 3:1 says, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.” We live in a time of visions and dreams, but not all visions and dreams are of the Lord. Jesus said, “Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48). One thing that is required of us is great discretion. Proverbs 2:11 says, “Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee.”

PART FOUR

THE ACTION GIFTS  
OF THE SPIRIT





## 35.

### *INTRODUCTION TO THE ACTION GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT*

## WHERE THE WORD OF A KING IS, THERE IS POWER

Thus far, we have considered six of the nine gifts of the Spirit: the gift of tongues, the gift of the interpretation of tongues, the gift of prophecy, the gift of the word of knowledge, the gift of the word of wisdom, and the gift of discerning of spirits. These gifts are God's provision for the spiritual maturation of the church, starting with each individual believer. By their use, the Christian is edified, exhorted, and comforted. His eyes and ears are opened to spiritual knowledge that he could not otherwise perceive. With the Word of God, the Spirit of the Lord, and these six gifts, he has everything he needs to "live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Titus 2:12). However, to be content with one's personal wellbeing is not a Christian ideal. We must never forget the multitudes of people still living under Satan's thumb.

We are now ready to consider the final three gifts of the Spirit: the gift of faith, the gift of the working of miracles, and the gifts of healing. These are the "action" gifts of the Spirit; by their use, Christians can perform supernatural acts in the name of Jesus Christ. But before we go further, let us be sure to understand the purpose for which the church has received such power.

On the day Jesus was received up into heaven, he gave final instructions to his disciples: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). With these words, he committed to the church the work of reconciling men to God. With a second witness from Paul, God established this commissioning and provided further explanation for us.

And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. (2 Corinthians 5:18–20)

We have been entrusted with the *ministry* of reconciliation, and the *word* of reconciliation. But God has given us more than a mission and a message. As promised, he has supplied all of our need. He has also given us the *power* to bear witness to his name.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Jesus said, “This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (Matt. 24:14). But the preaching of the Gospel requires more than human testimony. “The kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,” says 1 Corinthians 4:20. Words alone are not sufficient to bear witness to “the exceeding greatness of his power” (Eph. 1:19). In order to be *fully* preached, the gospel of the kingdom must be preached in the power of his might, with the accompaniment of signs and wonders.

Through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ. (Romans 15:19)

The Lord confirmed the word that Paul spoke with signs and wonders. This is his promise to all that preach the gospel of his kingdom.

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with *them*, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. (Mark 16:20)

As we bear witness to him, he bears witness to us in return, providing supernatural evidence that we speak on his behalf.

## WHERE THE WORD OF A KING IS, THERE IS POWER

God also bearing *them* witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will .... (Hebrews 2:4)

When our mission and our message are confirmed by the power of his might, we will be able to say like Paul, "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power" (1 Thess. 1:5). This is what it means to *fully preach* the Gospel.

### IN DEMONSTRATION OF THE SPIRIT AND OF POWER

People make conversation. Kings make decrees. A king speaks with all the authority his political, military, economic, and social might affords him. His words are as powerful as his kingdom is strong. Just as no willow tree can resist the wind, there is no underling who can resist the king's command, no subordinate to whom he must answer.

Where the word of a king *is*, *there is* power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou? (Ecclesiastes 8:4)

If the word of a king has power, how much more the word of the King of kings? His name is "above every name" (Phil. 2:9). "At the name of Jesus," says verse 10, "every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth." For a truth, who can say to him, "What doest thou?" What power in heaven or earth can overrule him?

If the word of a king has power, and Jesus is the King of kings, the only explanation for impotent preaching is that it is not his word being preached. If it is his word, it will be confirmed with signs following. This is axiomatic. You cannot sever our King's word from his power.

We labor in vain when we only talk about the Word of God and do not speak the word of the King. To speak the word of the King requires more than familiarity with the Scriptures. What the Lord said yesterday was for yesterday. What he says tomorrow is for tomorrow. The word of the King is his word to us today. It is his *anointed* word and his *appointed* word; it is the right word at the precise time. When the King speaks, it is "Thus sayeth the LORD." This is what it means to truly speak in the name of Jesus Christ. Such a word can only be known through the inspiration and revelation of the Spirit.

When Paul came to Corinth, he knew he had arrived at a renowned center of philosophy. Here, the wisdom of man was held in the highest regard. But Paul did not kowtow to their scholarship. He had not come to Greece seeking their approval or praise. Paul came to deliver the testimony of the King.

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1)

Because he spoke the word of the King, the Lord confirmed his Word with demonstration of spiritual power.

And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (vv. 4-5)

Enticing words are like freshly cut flowers. After a few days their beauty fades and the flowers are discarded in favor of a new bouquet. If I can persuade you by my words, another man can dissuade you by his. But when we preach the word of the King, the Lord himself will do the astonishing. He will confirm his Word with signs, miracles, and wonders in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.

And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. (Luke 4:32)

With a demonstration of his power, the Lord validates the message and mission of his servants. Those who go forth with the excellency of the sword of the Spirit, rather than excellency of speech, are sure to see his mighty arm bared on their behalf.

The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God. (Isaiah 52:10)

### THE "ACTION" GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

It is wonderfully significant that the biblical chronicle of the primitive (first-century) church is called the *Acts* of the Apostles. This is not the story of people who believed that the blood of Jesus entitled them to a life of wealth and ease. The book of Acts is the story of men and women who lived and died so that others could hear the gospel of God. They were not rich in this world, but they were rich in good works. It is for such people that the "action" gifts of the Spirit – the gift of faith, the gift of the working of miracles, and the gifts of healing – were intended.

Jesus said, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5). This same light "hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6). We make that light to "shine before men" by our good works. This is the reason the Church of Jesus Christ has been

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given such wonderful power – that by our good works we may bear witness to him and further the Kingdom of God.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

(Matthew 5:16)



*THE GIFT OF FAITH*

## OPEN THOU MINE EYES

I was nineteen years old, living on my own in Seattle, Washington, and waiting at a bus stop to go home after work. Over the next thirty minutes, I was approached by three different people, each inviting me to his particular religious meeting. The first person, a young man, was part of a rather infamous cult with roots in South Korea. The second person, another young man, was a member of a Hindu sect instantly recognizable by their saffron robes, shaven heads, and singsong chanting. The third person to speak to me was an attractive girl who invited me to a Christian fellowship at her home. As far as I was concerned, the only thing that set her apart from the other two was her gender. A pretty girl had invited me to her home, and that was good enough for me.

At the time, I was a confirmed atheist. As I grew up, my father regularly voiced his opinion that church was a meeting place for fools and charlatans. At the elementary school I attended in Hawaii, I heard that Christianity was the white man's religion, a tool of colonialism, and that the missionaries destroyed what was once an island paradise. As a family, we went to church only on rare occasions, always grudgingly, and only to appease visiting relatives. Once I was invited to dinner at the home of a high school friend. When his mother asked

him to pray before we ate, I thought she was making a joke and I burst out in laughter. When I realized I was the only one laughing, I wanted to hide under the table. But as soon as she left the room I began to ridicule my friend.

Back in Seattle, I attended the home fellowships regularly, but not for virtuous reasons. I responded to the girl's kindness with the desperate kind of infatuation only the godless know. As for the meetings, I endured them only to spend time with her afterwards. I snickered when they prayed and cringed as they sang their songs. I sneered at the notion that I needed to be "saved." But I was determined to hide all this from the girl for fear of losing her. I fully expected that, with time and patience, I would be the one to convert her.

One day, she handed me a card with a verse printed on it and told me I should memorize it. It was Proverbs 3:5: "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." Despite my pledge to hide my contempt, I could restrain myself no longer. I gave that card back to her and said, "I'm sorry, but that is the stupidest thing I have ever read in my life." The dam was broken, and a flood of bitter unbelief came pouring out of my soul. "That is religion for you," I said. "You trust in something you cannot see, and deny what is right in front of your eyes. I *cannot* do that. I *will not* do that."

To her credit, she didn't argue with me. She knew my condescending attitude only confirmed the testimony of the Bible: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

Just a few weeks later, I was taking a walk in the early evening. There are only a few events in my life that I can recall so vividly. I was thinking about all the things that I had heard at the fellowship meetings, things about the Bible, about Jesus, and salvation. "It is so stupid," I said to myself. My words fell into rhythm with my steps on the sidewalk. "It is so stupid. It is so stupid." Suddenly I stopped dead in my tracks. "Oh my God," I gasped. "It is true." I didn't see a vision or hear a voice. I just knew. I knew that I was a sinner in need of salvation, and that Jesus was the only Savior. For the first time in my life I said a prayer that I knew was being heard in heaven. Right there on the sidewalk, I was born again.

Many, many years have passed since that day. The girl who first invited me to fellowship went her own way soon afterward, and where she is today, I cannot say. My Christian walk has had many ups



and downs, and there have been many times when I have doubted my commitment to Christ. Still, I can honestly say that I have never doubted him, or that the Bible is true. So what happened? What occurred in my life to change me from someone who could not even acknowledge the *existence* of God to someone who wants nothing more than to serve him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength? The answer is simple: I once was blind, but now I see.

Long before I knew him, God instilled in me a burning desire to know the truth. That was all that mattered to me – not a career, not friendships, not even love. I wanted to know what was worth dying for, because then I would know what was worth living for. I was open to all possibilities, except one. Even today, I am struck by how much I did not *want* to be a Christian. In my pride, I wanted the truth to be packaged in something exotic; something sophisticated. Christianity was the last place I expected to find anything of value. But in his mercy and grace, God allowed me to see for myself that many things I *thought* were true were not. He shielded me from troubles I wholeheartedly embraced. When he knew I was ready, he introduced me to “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). What I could see, I could not deny. Jesus is Lord of all.

### THE EVIDENCE OF THINGS NOT SEEN

“The just shall live by faith.” This precept is stated no less than four times in the Scriptures (see Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38). “Faith toward God” is one of the fundamental “principles of the doctrine of Christ” (see Hebrews 6:1). Yet the concept of living in faith may be the most misunderstood precept in all Christendom.

Faith is absolutely foolish to the natural man. There is nothing that runs so contrary to his reasoning than to trust in something he cannot see. To him, all faith is blind faith – an irrational confidence based on wishful thinking rather than solid evidence. Sadly, this misconception often remains with him even after he comes to Christ, becoming a very shaky foundation for his religious ideas.

Christian faith is not blind at all. The Gospel of Matthew sheds wonderful light on this subject.

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? (Matthew 16:13–15)

It is not what your friends or neighbors say about Jesus that determines your faith. It is not what your pastor says about him; it is not even what Jesus says of himself. Who do *you* say that he is?

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed *it* unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.  
(vv. 16–17)

Nothing in the appearance of Jesus revealed his divinity. If there *really* was a halo shining around his head, do you think anyone would have crucified him? Peter could see that Jesus was a very special man, but he could never reach the conclusion on his own that Jesus was the Son of the Living God. Only God could reveal this to him.

How do you know that Jesus is the Christ? You were not there when Jesus told “doubting” Thomas, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing” (John 20:27). There are innumerable religions in this world, countless philosophies and creeds. Why do you believe that the Bible is the Word of God? If you are a believer, it is because your eyes have been opened to the truth. Opening the eyes of the blind is the work of the Lord.

To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, *and* them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.  
(Isaiah 42:7)

To open their eyes, *and* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. (Acts 26:18)

Do you remember the two men on the road to Emmaus? Even though Jesus walked and talked with them, they did not recognize him. Luke 24:16 says, “Their eyes were holden [held shut] that they should not know him.” But it was not their physical sight that was impaired. In 2 Corinthians 4:4, Paul testifies that “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” The Lord opened their eyes, so they could know him.

And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed *it*, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. (Luke 24:30–31)

That is how the gift of faith works. God opens “the eyes of your understanding” that you may know him.

The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints .... (Ephesians 1:18)

Before your eyes were opened, you could not believe.

Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with *their* eyes, nor understand with *their* heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.

(John 12:39-40)

But when your eyes are open, there is nothing left to argue about. What you can see, you cannot deny. To walk by faith is not to walk with your eyes closed to reality. To walk by faith, your eyes must be open to a *greater* reality, the *spiritual* reality. The revelation from God is the concrete evidence of things invisible to the natural eyes. As Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

### HIS POWER TO US-WARD WHO BELIEVE

When you remember how simple it was to receive faith in the beginning, you know how simple it should remain. But so often in our pursuit of spiritual development, we redirect our efforts into self-improvement. We ignore the wisdom of Paul who asked, “Are ye so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal. 3:3).

As a Christian, I spent many frustrating years trying to make myself believe the Word of God. I would search the Scriptures until I found a promise that seemed appropriate to my situation. Then I would try everything short of brain surgery to lodge that verse in my mind. I tried to rearrange my thinking patterns. I worried over my choice of words. In the end, I was beguiled far from “the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor. 11:3).

Jesus asked, “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Matt. 6:27). I have to laugh when I think of all the years that I tried to grow by “taking thought.” I imagine Christ asking for volunteers, tape measure in hand. *Go ahead, show me. Show us all. Grow an inch.* If we cannot make ourselves grow physically, how much less can we make ourselves grow spiritually?

Some people teach that “believing equals receiving.” They claim this is a universal truth, applicable to people of all creeds. They say this precept was validated by Jesus himself when he cursed the fig tree.

And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away. And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*. (Mark 11:20–24)

Is Jesus teaching that you can have “what things soever ye desire” simply by taking thought? This would not only contradict his teaching in Matthew 6, but other Scriptures as well. James 4:3 says, “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” Doesn’t “what things soever ye desire” include those things we *wrongly* desire? Why then don’t we receive them?

What differentiates a proper request from asking amiss? The answer is found in the statement, “Have faith in God.” Before we ask God for what we desire, we should ask what *he* desires for us. Jesus said, “I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30). He taught his disciples to pray, “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt. 6:10). To have faith in God is to seek his will.

Jesus did not teach that with *believing* nothing is impossible. He taught that with *God*, nothing is impossible. Whatever God wants done shall be done.

The Bible does not talk about “the power of believing.” Faith is not an ability to focus your thoughts until you have conjured up a new reality. That doctrine smells of witchcraft. Our faith is in God and in the power of his might. We believe in *his* power, not our own.

And what *is* the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power .... (Ephesians 1:19)

My feelings of self-worth rise and fall on a regular basis. But my feelings about myself have nothing to do with my assessment of God. On my *worst* day, I have no problems believing in the exceeding great-

ness of *his* power. My faith is not based on how I feel about myself. My faith is based on what I know about God. He is Almighty.

One day, the apostles came to Jesus and said, “Increase our faith” (Luke 17:5). The problem is, any number multiplied by zero still results in zero! The apostles did not need *more* faith. They needed faith, period. “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed,” Jesus said, “ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you” (v. 6).

If *faith* got the job done, you would need big faith for a big job. My faith is not in my faith. My faith is in God. I do not need big faith, because I have a big God.

I don't believe in prayer. I believe in God, and that is why I pray. I don't believe in reading the Bible. I believe in God, and that is why I read the Bible. I don't believe in going to church, in tithing, or in doing good works. I believe in God, and that is why I do those things.

### OPEN HIS EYES, THAT HE MAY SEE

The sixth chapter of 2 Kings contains a wonderful lesson about the gift of faith, clearing the path from confusion for all that will follow. It was a time of battle, and “the king of Syria warred against Israel” (2 Kings 6:8). Time and again, the Syrians made plans to ambush the king of Israel, but every time, the prophet Elisha was able to forewarn him.

And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. (2 Kings 6:9–10)

The Syrian king suspected treachery in his camp. Someone was telling the Israelites his plans! Verse 11 says, “He called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?” But his men assured him of their loyalty. “None, my lord, O king,” they said, “but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (v. 12). Elisha was advising his king by divine revelation. The king of Syria was determined to put an end to Elisha's interference, and sent out his army to capture the man of God.

Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. (v. 14)

Early the next day, Elisha's servant went out to begin his morning duties. Imagine his panic when he saw that the Syrian army had surrounded the city. "Alas, my master!" he cried to Elisha, "how shall we do?" (v. 15). But the prophet was entirely at ease. "Fear not," he assured his trembling manservant, "for they that be with us are more than they that be with them."

Put yourself in the servant's shoes. He knew he was not just having a bad dream. With his own eyes he had seen an army of soldiers too numerous to count. Inside Elisha's house there was only the prophet and his servant: one, two. But Elisha said, "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." Now the servant was *really* afraid. Apparently his master had lost his mind!

And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. (v. 17)

Completely outnumbering the Syrian army was the mighty host of heaven, sent by God to protect his servant. Elisha's confidence was based on the evidence of things not seen by his servant, but clearly seen by him. His statement was not the product of wishful thinking, nor of positive affirmation. He spoke a simple fact: "They that be with us are more than they that be with them."

So answer me this: When did the angels arrive? Did they appear the moment the servant saw them, or were they already there, invisible to his sight? You know the answer. They were *already* there. He just could not see them.

Faith does not create. Faith recognizes what God has already provided. Your faith in Jesus did not make him the Savior of the world. By faith, you recognized who he already was.

You do not need to ask God for more faith. Faith the size of a mustard seed is more than enough. You need to ask him to open your eyes. What you can see, you can believe.

Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. (Psalm 119:18)

Faith is the ability *from* God to *believe* God. He gave that faith to you as a gift. Every scriptural and historical record of the blind recovering their sight pales in comparison to the gift of spiritual sight given to all that come to Christ. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves," says Ephesians 2:8, "it is the gift of God."

Faith is the power to believe on his name.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name....

(John 1:12)

No, our power is not in believing. Our victory is in believing on his name, in *his* power. "This is the victory that overcometh the world," says 1 John 5:4, "even our faith."





## 37.

### *THE GIFT OF FAITH*

## UNFEIGNED FAITH

The gift of faith is the ability God gives whereby you can believe the revelation you have received from God, no matter how contrary it may seem to your natural mind. The gift of faith works in tandem with the revelation gifts of the Spirit. Revelation *precedes* faith. It is the evidence upon which faith is based. By faith, you embrace those things shown to you spiritually, even though they are “things not seen” by your natural eyes. It is faith that brings the revelation from God into your heart.

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak .... (2 Corinthians 4:13)

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews celebrates some of the champions of faith of the Old Testament. It is man’s tendency to attribute their achievements to human strength; we conclude that they must have been holier and more righteous than we are. But Bible readers know that God does not hide the frailties of his servants. We can read of Noah’s drunkenness, Abraham’s lie to Abimelech, and Peter’s denials of Christ. Such records remind us that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Cor. 4:7).

## THE FAITH OF NOAH

One of the champions of faith is Noah, the builder of the ark. Do you know that before the Flood, it had never rained on the earth? Since the days of Adam and Eve, “there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground” (Gen. 2:6). The idea of water falling from the sky must have seemed very strange to Noah! Where did he find the faith to build the ark? Hebrews 11:7 explains:

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. (Hebrews 11:7)

God warned Noah “of things not seen as yet,” the drowning of all the inhabitants of the earth. This was a revelation, a word of knowledge. We can read this warning in the sixth chapter of Genesis.

And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein *is* the breath of life, from under heaven; *and* every thing that *is* in the earth shall die. (Genesis 6:17)

Self-preservation is a powerful motivator! The ark was very literally Noah’s lifeboat. This was a man who knew what it means to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12)! Noah did not need to tie a string around his finger to remind himself to work on the ark. You can be sure that he “moved with fear.” I imagine that his wife had a difficult time persuading him to stop once in a while to eat. He paid no mind when his friends and relatives ridiculed him. Noah’s eyes were opened to the future. He had seen the coming destruction of the earth’s population. Finding faith was not a problem.

## THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

Abraham was such a champion of faith that he is called “the father of all them that believe” (Rom. 4:12). It was Abraham who “against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations” (v. 18). But this faith did not come naturally to Abraham. Genesis 17:17 tells us that when God told him that he and his wife Sarah would parent a child, “Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” According to the evidence of things seen, he judged such things impossible. But Romans 4:19 says, “Being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old,

neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb." Does this mean he denied the physical evidence? Did he stand before his mirror each morning and do his "daily affirmations" until it became true? *I am in the prime of my life! I am young and virile!* Is that what Jesus meant when he said, "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Matt. 11:24)?

I knew a sincere Christian woman who was unhappily unmarried. It is funny, but the same people who complain how much more they could do for Jesus if only they were married usually become the people who complain how much more they could do for Jesus if only they were single again. Anyway, this woman wanted a husband. She knew what Jesus said. But her conception of what it means to "believe that ye receive" was to pretend she already had a husband. For the evening meal, she prepared enough food for two. As she ate, she told her "husband" about her day. Thankfully, she stopped this practice before she drove herself to madness.

Abraham's eyes were opened to "the evidence of things not seen" that overruled the evidence of the things he could see. The eyes of his understanding were opened to see that the determining factor to this promise was not *his* power, but the power of God. Abraham stopped considering his own limited ability and instead turned his eyes to the limitless ability of the Almighty. God told him, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant" (Gen. 17:7). God, not Abraham, would establish this covenant. By faith, Abraham believed the revelation, "fully persuaded that, what [God] had promised, he was able also to perform" (v. 21).

### THE FAITH OF DAVID

Perhaps the most famous underdog story ever told is the story of David and Goliath. Children especially love to hear about the brave shepherd boy who faced the giant of Gath with only a slingshot and "five smooth stones out of the brook" (1 Sam. 17:40). But what gave David the confidence to challenge the champion of the Philistines? Was it, as some suggest, his experience protecting his flock?

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught *him* by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. (1 Samuel 17:34-35)

I do not want to minimize the courage needed to face a lion or a bear, but I daresay that these animals cannot compare to a nine-foot-tall giant, dressed for battle, and skilled in combat. Undoubtedly many of the Hebrew soldiers had also hunted wild animals, but none of those men were lining up to face the giant. David showed no fear at all. What did he know that they did not?

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. (vv. 45-46)

I have watched many boxing contests in which a fighter brags to his opponent about all the terrible things he will do to him once the match begins. One good punch from the other man is usually all that it takes to shut the braggart's mouth. Boasting is almost always a camouflage for fear. Was David trying to boost his self-confidence? Was he trying to convince himself that things would turn out okay? What was the basis for his faith?

David's eyes could plainly see Goliath's height, his sword, his spear and his shield, but his faith was based on the evidence of things *not* seen. David did not tell Goliath what he *hoped* would happen; he told the giant what he *knew* would happen! God had shown him the outcome of the contest. For David, it was as if he had read the story in yesterday's newspaper. "The LORD will deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee." This was not wishful thinking. This was a word of knowledge! No wonder David "ran toward the army to meet the Philistine" (v. 48). He knew the end before the beginning!

And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang *it*, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. (v. 49)

### THE FAITH OF ELIJAH

Even if one of the men is a giant, one man facing another is still one-to-one. What gave Elijah the faith to challenge *four hundred and fifty* prophets of Baal? Once again, it was a revelation from God that

provided the evidence of things not seen.

Elijah did not close his eyes to the facts of the situation. “I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD,” he said, “but Baal’s prophets are four hundred and fifty men” (1 Kings 18:22). However, this was not a showdown of one man pitted against four hundred and fifty. This contest was between God and Baal. Who would show himself superior? Elijah laid out the rules of the competition:

Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under*: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay *it* on wood, and put no fire *under*: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. (vv. 23–24)

The prophets of Baal were invited to go first. They slaughtered a bullock, butchered it, and placed it upon the wood. Then the four hundred and fifty men began to call out to their god, “from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us” (v. 26a). Imagine the din of four hundred and fifty confident witchdoctors, crying out with all their might. “But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made” (v. 26b).

Standing in Elijah’s shoes, most Christians would be greatly intimidated. But not only was Elijah unafraid, he was *amused* by their spectacle. As the sun reached high in the noonday sky, he began to ruthlessly mock them. “Cry aloud,” he said, “for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked” (v. 27). His sarcasm frustrated them all the more, and they “cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon them” (v. 28). This continued for hours, through the midday and until the time of the evening sacrifice. One by one, the booming voices faded into silence; the frenzied dancers collapsed to the ground.

Now it was Elijah’s turn. Slowly and deliberately he built an altar and then dug a trench around it. He placed the butchered cow upon arranged timber. Then he turned to those standing by and ordered them, “Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt sacrifice, and on the wood” (v. 33). The eyes of the pagan priests grew wide as they watched.

And he said, Do *it* the second time. And they did *it* the second time. And he said, Do *it* the third time. And they did *it* the third

time. And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. (vv. 34–35)

Just as the last sliver of evening sun melted into the horizon, Elijah began to pray. “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel,” he said, “let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word” (v. 36).

Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. (v. 38)

Fire looks most magnificent at night, and God wanted a spectacular display. As always, his timing was perfect. The fire from heaven exploded upon the altar, instantly evaporating the twelve barrels-worth of water. “And when all the people saw it,” says verse 39, “they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God.”

It was the Lord, and not Elijah, who arranged this contest. He determined the rules, and he instructed Elijah to make the prophets of Baal go first. God assured Elijah that there would be no answer to the pagan prophets, no matter how they yelled, bled, and thrashed about. Imagine how the devil and his army of evil spirits screamed out in frustration as they tried to escape the grasp of the angelic host of heaven! *Don't worry*, God had told his servant. *I've got everything under control.*

“I have done all these things at thy word,” said Elijah. It was the Lord who told him when to build the altar and how much water to pour on the sacrifice. He even told him what he should pray. And though the Scriptures do not say this, it is easy to imagine the Lord telling his prophet, *One more thing, Elijah. When you start to pray, make sure you are not standing next to the altar.* The moment Elijah finished his prayer, the fire of the Lord fell from heaven.

It is worth mentioning that none of these things would have happened if Elijah had acted on his own accord rather than in the will of God. Otherwise it would have been the four hundred and fifty who celebrated at the end of the day, and another servant of God prematurely awaiting the resurrection of the dead. But Elijah did not act presumptuously. He had the evidence of things not seen. Before he ever challenged the pagan priests, he knew exactly how things would unfold. All he had to do was follow God's instructions. His faith was neither in himself nor in a positive outcome. His faith was in the revelation God had shown him, and in the power of his might.

THE UNFEIGNED FAITH THAT IS IN THEE

It is clear that Paul loved his son in the faith, Timothy. He was a young man of many virtues, and unquestionable commitment. One quality that particularly thrilled Paul was his unfeigned faith.

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. (2 Timothy 1:5)

Unfeigned – genuine – faith is part of the essence of true Christianity.

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned ....

(1 Timothy 1:5)

Make-believe is a game for children. Faith is not living in fantasy. It is not pretending. There is far too much pretending in Christianity. Instead of living in faith, we live in fear, hiding behind our religious masks. We “act” like Christians, pretending we are doing better than we really are. Being “positive” is no excuse for being artificial. Quit *acting* like a Christian! *Be* a Christian!

Believing in God is not make-believe! True faith is based upon real evidence. By the revelation gifts of the Spirit, the Lord opens the eyes of our understanding to the unseen things of God. Then, by the gift of faith, we are able to believe that revelation, no matter how contrary it may seem to our natural mind.

“We walk by faith, not by sight,” says 2 Corinthians 5:7. Our eyes cannot see the air we breathe, but only a fool would deny its existence. When your eyes have been opened to the invisible things of God, it is easy to believe.





## 38.

### *THE GIFT OF THE WORKING OF MIRACLES*

## IN THIS THOU SHALT KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD

Properly used, the individual gifts of the Spirit function as a collective whole. By the edification gifts a Christian is rejuvenated, and able to minister the same to his fellow believers. By the revelation gifts he is enlightened with wisdom and knowledge pertinent to the mission at hand. By the gift of faith he is able to receive that revelation into his heart. And upon the hearing of faith, (for “faith cometh by hearing,” says Romans 10:17), he can do mighty deeds in the power of God’s might by the gift of the working of miracles.

He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, *doeth he it* by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? (Galatians 3:5)

A miracle is a physical exhibition of God’s omnipotence; it is the power of heaven made manifest suddenly and dramatically here on earth. The gift of the working of miracles is the ability God gives whereby you can bring to pass signs and wonders in his name, according to the revelation you have received from him.

God ordains miracles, not miracle workers. The gift of the working of miracles does not empower you to perform miracles of your own choosing. Acts 5:12 testifies that “by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.” Acts 14:3 adds

precept to precept, saying that the Lord “granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” God gives no man unlimited access to his power. He grants his people the privilege to *perform* his will, not to determine it. The power to authorize miracles is retained by him alone. The gift does not make us powerful ministers; it makes us ministers of his power.

“Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” asks Lamentations 3:37. The answer is *no one*. Miracles come to pass at God’s command, not yours. To do a miracle in the name of Jesus Christ is to do a miracle that he wants done.

Turn this verse around, and you will see this remarkable truth about the miracle working power of God: When *the Lord* commands it, and *you* say it, it *will* come to pass! Why? Because where the word of our King is, there is power!

For he spake, and it was *done*; he commanded, and it stood fast. (Psalm 33:9)

By the revelation gifts we *learn* the will of God. By the gift of faith we *believe* the will of God. By the gift of the working of miracles we *do* the will of God.

### MIRACLES, SIGNS, AND WONDERS

A miracle of God is both a sign and a wonder. It is a wonder because it transcends natural law. For example, according to the laws of nature, an axe head will sink in water. When Elisha caused an axe head to “swim,” it was a wonder.

But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water; and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast *it* in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take *it* up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it. (2 Kings 6:5–7)

There is no such thing as a haphazard act of God. There is a divine reason for every miracle appointed by God that is far more significant than the spectacle itself and the temporal benefit it provides. For example, when Jesus fed “about five thousand men” with “five barley loaves, and two small fishes” (John 6:9), their hunger was temporarily satisfied. By the next day the people were hungry again. But Jesus did not provide more groceries. The purpose of the miracle was not to show that Jesus could multiply food. The “sign” or reason for the miracle was to make known Jesus, the Bread of Life.

## IN THIS THOU SHALT KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. (John 6:35)

The eleventh chapter of John tells of the day when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, a wonder indeed. But today Lazarus is again dead, awaiting the resurrection of the just. What was the reason for the miracle in Bethany? This sign declared Jesus as the Resurrection and the Life.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ... (John 11:25)

During my studies that preceded the writing of this book, I enjoyed many thrilling moments of discovery. But none can compare to my excitement upon seeing the pattern to every miracle recorded in the Bible. In every example of the working of miracles you can see:

1. God's command,
2. The servant's obedience to that command,
3. The wonder come to pass, and
4. The sign declared.

As we examine the miracles wrought by Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Jesus Christ, this pattern will become undeniably vivid. When the Lord commands it, and you say it, it will come to pass.

### THE ROD THAT BECAME A SERPENT

The prophet Jonah resisted God's call because he did not agree with God's plan of mercy for the Ninevites. Moses resisted God's call because he did not think he was the right person for the job. "Who am I," asked Moses, "that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exod. 3:11). There has never been a more reluctant hero than Moses. Humility like his is a great asset to any ministry because it leads a man to rely on God and not on himself. It is not for nothing that Moses is honored as "very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). God forbid that we should ever grow so confident in our "spirituality" that we no longer seek his help!

When God called Moses he said, "Gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me" (Exod. 3:16). But Moses was hesitant. "They will not believe me, nor hearken unto

my voice,” he said, “for they will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee” (Exod. 4:1). Every genuine servant of God has wrestled with these fears. Who am I? Why should anyone believe me?

God was about to teach Moses a very important lesson about going forth to minister in the power of his might. “What is that in your hand?” he asked. Moses looked a little longer than necessary at the shepherd’s staff he carried, puzzled that God should want him to state the obvious. “A rod,” he answered. “Cast it on the ground,” said the Lord. If Moses wanted to ask “Why?” he thought better of it and tossed the rod down at his feet. He almost jumped out of his skin when the staff began to writhe on the ground, flicking out a forked tongue. “It became a serpent,” says verse 3, “and Moses fled from before it.” The Lord called him back, and Moses reluctantly returned. “Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail,” commanded God. Surely Moses knew this was the *worst* way to pick up a snake, leaving its head free to coil up and strike. The Bible does not say how long it took Moses to find the courage but “he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand” (v. 4). He stood there open-mouthed and wide-eyed, staring at the rod-turned-snake-turned-rod he held in his hand. God said, “That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee” (v. 5).

Moses had told God, “They will say, The LORD hath not appeared unto thee.” The Lord gave him supernatural assurance that he himself would provide all the proof that was needed. He would confirm his word with miracles, signs, and wonders.

Galatians 6:4 says, “Let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.” This does not mean that we should strive with our brethren until they are convinced of our special ministries. As we walk in obedience to God, he will show his approval in his own special way, just as he did for his Son.

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know .... (Acts 2:22)

Throughout the ages God has borne witness to his true servants “with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost” (Heb. 2:4). As Proverbs 18:16 says, “A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.” If God has given

you a ministry to his people, he will give you a people to serve. He will also provide supernatural confirmation that he is indeed working with you.

First came the command. God told Moses to cast his rod on the ground. Moses' response was to obey; he cast it on the ground. The wonder came to pass when the rod became a serpent. Finally, the reason for the miracle – the sign – was declared: “That they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee.”

What was Moses' contribution in bringing to pass this spectacular event? Did he lift the rod high above his head while he called down the powers of heaven with a voice that parted the clouds? Did he utter a prayer so eloquent that the seas rolled and the earth quaked? Did bolts of lightning shoot out of his extended fingers like a sorcerer as he pointed them at the rod? No, no, no! Moses did one thing; he cast down the rod. He did not even know what was going to happen. He simply obeyed.

The book of Acts tells of “a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one” (Acts 8:9). All the people of the city paid homage to him, “from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God” (v. 9). You can be absolutely certain that Simon dressed up his sorcery in theatrical robes. Tragically, there are many people in pulpits today who also give out that they are “some great one.” They want you to believe that the power comes from their special prayers, rather than the God to whom they claim to pray. As Jesus would say, “They have their reward.” There is a better alternative: the simple, unpretentious obedience of Moses.

God sent Moses back to Egypt with full assurance that he would not be left to his own resources to fulfill his mission. By revelation, the Lord told Moses all that awaited him on his mission.

And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go. And I will give this people favour in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty: But every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye

shall put *them* upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil the Egyptians. (Exodus 3:19–22)

God told Moses that he would stretch out *his* hand to smite Egypt with wonders. In Exodus 4:21, he told Moses, “When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in *thine* hand.” Which is correct? Did the hand of God or the hand of Moses perform the wonders? This is not a contradiction, but rather a perfect explanation of the working of miracles. We are strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

### THE MIRACLE OF THE WATER TURNED TO BLOOD

As commanded by the Lord, and by the gift of the working of miracles, Moses and Aaron wrought ten fearsome miracles in Egypt. These miracles are most often called the ten plagues, and are chronicled in chapters seven to twelve of Exodus. They are the plague of blood (Exod. 7:19–20), the plague of frogs (8:5–6), the plague of lice (8:16–17), the plague of flies (8:20–24), the plague upon cattle (9:1–7), the plague of boils (9:8–10), the plague of hail mixed with fire (9:22–23), the plague of locusts (10:12–15), the plague of darkness (10:21–23), and the plague of death (11:4–5; 12:29). In each miracle, the pattern is consistent. God gave a command, his servant obeyed, the wonder came to pass, and the sign was declared. Let us consider the first plague, the plague of blood:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, Say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and stretch out thine hand upon the waters of Egypt, upon their streams, upon their rivers, and upon their ponds, and upon all their pools of water, that they may become blood; and *that* there may be blood throughout all the land of Egypt, both in *vessels of wood*, and in *vessels of stone*. And Moses and Aaron did so, as the LORD commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that *were* in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that *were* in the river were turned to blood. (Exodus 7:19–20)

By revelation, the Lord gave his command to Moses, and Moses communicated God’s will to Aaron. “I have made thee a god to Pharaoh,” he said to Moses, “and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet. Thou shalt speak all that I command thee: and Aaron thy brother shall speak unto Pharaoh” (Exod. 7:1–2). Moses and Aaron did as the Lord commanded, and when Aaron smote the waters of Egypt with his rod, the wonder came to pass. “All the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.” The sign – the reason for the miracle – is declared in

verse 17: “In this thou shalt know that I am the LORD.”

A miracle brings mortal man face to face with his Creator. From that moment forward, he is without excuse. His choices are vastly simplified: he can either forsake all other gods to serve the Most High, or he can harden his heart like the Pharaoh. One way or another, he is never the same.

Each of these terrible wonders declared God’s supremacy over his creation, and his favor toward his chosen people. The plague of frogs was ordained “that thou mayest know that there is none like unto the LORD our God” (Exod. 8:10). The plagues of lice and flies were ordained “that thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth” (v. 22). The plague on the cattle, and the plague of boils was “that thou mayest know that there is none like me in all the earth” (Exod. 9:14). The thunder and hail mixed with fire was “that thou mayest know how that the earth is the LORD’s” (v. 29). The plagues of locusts, of darkness, and on the firstborn of Egypt were “that ye may know how that the LORD doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel” (Exod. 11:7). Every miracle was a sign and a wonder. The reason for the wonder was the truth it declared about God.

And the Egyptians shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I stretch forth mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them. And Moses and Aaron did as the LORD commanded them, so did they. (Exodus 7:5–6)

God had promised Moses that the Children of Israel would not leave Egypt empty-handed. By the hand of Joseph, the Lord had brought great wealth to Egypt. His reasoning was now apparent. By the hand of his servant Moses, this wealth left Egypt in the hands of the Israelites.

And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them *such things as they required*. And they spoiled the Egyptians. (Exodus 12:35–36)

From slavery to victory, the Hebrews witnessed a remarkable turn of events. They spoiled the Egyptians. We who were once slaves to the king of darkness will join the Lord in reclaiming all that rightfully belongs to him as well.

*And* having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:15)

Some people wonder why we do not see miracles like this every day. After all, there have been countless world leaders as evil as the Pharaoh. Why are they not visited with fiery hail? The answer is, these miracles were given as a sign for all generations, not just the one in which it occurred.

And that thou mayest tell in the ears of thy son, and of thy son's son, what things I have wrought in Egypt, and my signs which I have done among them; that ye may know how that I *am* the LORD. (Exodus 10:2)

What Jesus said of the nobleman could be said of most people. "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" (John 4:48). How many miracles do you need to see before you know that God reigns supreme? How many miracles do you need to see before you believe that the miracles in the Bible are true? The point is not to see many miracles. The point is to believe.



## 39.

### *THE GIFT OF THE WORKING OF MIRACLES*

## THE WATER THAT WAS MADE WINE

Miracles are born of the great I AM. All that God requires of man is to yield to his superior wisdom and walk in the power of his might. Whenever man complies with the will of God, signs and wonders are sure to follow.

### THE MIRACLES OF ELIJAH

One day Jesus brought Peter, James, and John up into a mountain. There the three disciples saw the Transfiguration on the Mount. Jesus “was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him” (Matt. 17:2–3). How small the three disciples must have felt in the company of these spiritual giants! It is a tribute to Moses and Elijah that they were counted worthy of such a grand fellowship. However, their inclusion had a deeper significance. This vision celebrated the end of one era – the dispensation of the law and the prophets – and the beginning of another.

The law and the prophets *were* until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. (Luke 16:16)

We have considered the miracles wrought by Moses. We now turn our attention to the miracles of Elijah. The prophet Elijah served God during the wicked reign of Ahab, a man who “did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him” (1 Kings 16:33). Ahab’s wife Jezebel was no less sinister. It was she who gave command to “cut off the prophets of the LORD” (1 Kings 18:4), slaughtering all but a remnant. In fact, she was the instigator behind her husband’s most heinous crimes.

But there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. (1 Kings 21:25).

What a time to be called to the ministry! Lest we fantasize that Elijah was too “spiritual” to ever be afraid, the Bible reminds us that he “was a man subject to like passions as we are” (James 5:17). Elijah was once so downcast that he longed for death. “It is enough,” he said, “now, O LORD, take away my life” (1 Kings 19:4). But in the end Elijah not only finished his course, he finished it in triumph. This is an encouragement and a rebuke to anyone who fears the world could grow too dark to further the gospel.

The biblical account of Elijah begins with the miracle of the drought. “As the LORD God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand,” he said to Ahab, “there shall be not dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). It was Elijah’s word inasmuch that he spoke it, but his words were born of the Spirit of God. As we now know, when the Lord has commanded it, and you say it, it will come to pass. Elijah “prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months” (James 5:17). His prayer was answered because he prayed according to God’s will.

Knowing that the wrath of the king would be turned towards Elijah, God ordered the prophet into hiding. “Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward,” he said, “and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before Jordan” (1 Kings 17:2). This was not a time for heroics; this was a time for obedience. Elijah “did according unto the word of the LORD” and God provided for him in a most amazing way.

And it shall be, *that* thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went and did according unto the word of the LORD: for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that *is* before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. (vv. 3–6)

In time the brook dried out. This did not hinder God's ability to care for his servant. The Lord had already prepared the next move. He told Elijah, "Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee" (v. 9).

At the city gates of Zarephath, Elijah saw a woman gathering sticks for a fire. "Fetch me, I pray thee," he said, "a little water in a vessel, that I may drink" (v. 10). As she started after the water, he added, "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand" (v. 11). The woman now confessed her dire situation. She had nothing but "an handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse." Her plan was to "dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die" (v. 12). But Elijah was resolute and said, "Make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son" (v. 13). How did he know there would be enough for him, the widow, *and* her son?

For thus saith the LORD God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day *that* the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth. And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days. *And* the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah. (vv. 14–16)

Elijah spoke as the Lord commanded. The wonder came to pass and "the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail." The grateful widow herself declared the corresponding sign when she said, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth" (v. 24).

### THE MIRACLES OF ELISHA

Elijah's life on earth did not end in the grave but with a miraculous ascent into heaven. His departure was anticipated by his contemporaries – the "sons of the prophets" – and his protégé Elisha.

And the sons of the prophets that *were* at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know *it*; hold ye your peace. (2 Kings 2:13)

When Elijah and Elisha crossed the Jordan together for the last time, "Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went

over on dry ground" (v. 8). Elisha seized the moment to ask a special blessing of his mentor: "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me" (v. 9). Elijah knew that such a request was beyond his ability to bestow. "Thou hast asked a hard thing," he said. "Nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so" (v. 10). Suddenly there appeared "a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

As he ascended, "Elisha saw it" (v. 11). The condition was fulfilled. Elisha "took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over" (v. 14). This miracle confirmed Elisha as the heir apparent to the ministerial office previously held by Elijah.

And when the sons of the prophets which *were* to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. (v. 15)

Like Elijah before him, Elisha miraculously multiplied oil for a poor widow, the wife of a prophet. Her husband had died leaving her in great debt, and now her sons faced a life of indentured servitude. "Thy servant my husband is dead," she told Elisha, "and the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen" (2 Kings 4:1). She had nothing to sell, she said, and "not any thing in the house, save a pot of oil" (v. 2).

Then he said, Go, borrow thee vessels abroad of all thy neighbours, even empty vessels; borrow not a few. And when thou art come in, thou shalt shut the door upon thee and upon thy sons, and shalt pour out into all those vessels, and thou shalt set aside that which is full. (vv. 3-4)

This was the revelation, the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of his servant. It is nice to see that Elisha did not give her a lecture on financial stewardship or trusting in God. This poor woman was not pressured by Elisha to *believe for a miracle*. All she needed to do was carry out Elisha's instructions.

So she went from him, and shut the door upon her and upon her sons, who brought *the vessels* to her; and she poured out. And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, *There is not a vessel more*. And the oil stayed. Then she came

and told the man of God. And he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay thy debt, and live thou and thy children of the rest. (vv. 5–7)

The *wonder* was that there was oil to fill every vessel. The *sign* was an eternal truth. Oil is symbolic of the Spirit of God. There is enough oil to fill every vessel in the Kingdom of God.

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call. (Acts 2:38–39)

Elijah is a figure of Jesus Christ, and Elisha is a figure of the church. Elisha received a “double portion” of the spirit that was upon Elijah. By the reckoning of the Scriptures, Elisha did twice the number of miracles done by his master. That Elisha would “outdo” his superior is an illustration of a truth later voiced by our Lord to his disciples.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater *works* than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. (John 14:12)

Elisha was no more Elijah than Timothy was Paul or *any* man is his teacher. As grateful as he was for Elijah’s ministry, Elisha served the living God and not a fond memory. Had Elisha not understood this, he would not have enjoyed the success he did. Elisha’s ministry will not be judged in comparison to the ministry of Elijah, but in the same way every ministry is judged. We are duty bound to carry out what the Lord commands us to do.

In the developmental years of my ministry, I was mentored by a man fifty years my senior, the late Rev. B.G. Leonard. I met Brother Leonard in the closing years of his life; in fact, I was the last person he would ever ordain. He was the kind of man I wanted to be – spiritually keen, faithful, self-sacrificing, and undauntedly courageous – a genuine man of God. He was a prolific author of prose, poetry, and song. Even in his old age he possessed a lightning-fast wit that often left me shaking my head in amazement. I loved him very much. We had a wonderful relationship. He liked talking to me, and I liked listening to him. Rev. Leonard once told me that he only liked to have *real* people around him. At first I did not grasp his meaning. What made a person *real*? I finally understood that I could only be real when I was being *myself*. Rev. Leonard taught me many things, but perhaps the greatest lesson I learned was that I should not try to be him. I should not act like him or preach the sermons that God gave him to preach.

I should be the man that God wanted me to be, with the message he gave me to present.

It is the responsibility of every Christian to “prove his own work” (Gal. 6:4). No man can fulfill another man’s calling or walk in another man’s ministry. That is why David refused to wear Saul’s armor when he faced Goliath. That armor was designed for another man.

And Saul armed David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head; also he armed him with a coat of mail. And David girded his sword upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved *it*. And David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved *them*. And David put them off him. (1 Samuel 17:38–39)

Too many pulpit speakers are only impersonators. Like actors in a play, they recite lines written by someone else, words they copied from a book of sermons. As a result, they bring a word filled with drama but void of authenticity. They wear armor they have not proved, and on their frame it is but the costume of their masquerade.

I cannot teach you to walk in faith if I’ve never walked in it myself. All I can do is tell you anecdotes of someone else’s faith. The pulpit is no place for second hand information. We cannot speak authoritatively on any subject we have not first proved.

It is written that David “served his own generation by the will of God” (Acts 13:36). The same is true for us all. Your ministry is uniquely your own, suited to the times to which you were born. Truth is constant from generation to generation, but the way we *minister* the truth adapts to time and place. Be a “real” minister of God. Be genuine. Prove your own work first, then present your findings to the church.

## THE MIRACLES OF JESUS OF NAZARETH

The third participant at the Mount of Transfiguration was, of course, Jesus. Only a few of the miracles wrought by Jesus are recorded in the Scriptures. “If they should be written every one,” wrote John, “even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25). The miracles of Christ that *are* recorded in the Bible are too numerous to mention here, but that is not the purpose of this lesson. We are looking for examples of the biblical precept in operation: when God commands it, and you say it, it will come to pass.

We have considered the first miracles worked by Moses and Elijah. We will likewise consider the first miracle wrought by Jesus, performed at a wedding in Cana.

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do *it*. (John 2:1-5)

When Jesus and his disciples arrived at the celebration, it had been going on for some time. Now the hosts of the party faced an embarrassing situation – they had run out of wine. (The word *wanted* does not imply a desire but a deficiency, as in Daniel 5:27: “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.”) It seems that Mary expected her son to do something about the problem. “They have no wine,” she said. Was she sending him to the market? Surely she did not anticipate his solution!

And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare *it*. (John 2:6-8)

Jesus is “the Word made flesh” (John 1:14). That is why we never read, “the word of the LORD came to Jesus.” He never began a sentence, “Thus saith the LORD.” When Jesus said, “Fill the waterpots with water,” he was speaking for God, as God. Everything he said or did was according to his Father’s will.

The faith (or lack thereof) of the servants at the wedding was no more an issue than with Moses and the rod that became a snake. They simply did as they were told. They filled the waterpots with water, and from the waterpots they filled the governor’s chalice. I suppose they almost dropped the waterpots when they saw what they were dispensing! It was a great wonder: the water had turned to wine.

When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: *but* thou hast kept the good wine until now. (John 2:9-10)

The purpose of this wonder was not to appease the thirst of the celebrators. The *sign* of the miracle is revealed in verse 11: “This

beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” Luke 4:32 says the people “were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.” Jesus himself said, “Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake” (John 14:11).

It is significant that both Moses and Jesus worked miracles that transformed water. Water is basic to all living things. Every man is “born of water” (John 3:5). Moses turned water into blood and Jesus turned water into wine. These wonders were declarations of their respective ministries. John 1:17 says, “For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”

Moses brought “the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2a). Paul said, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom. 7:9). Man became guilty before God. The water turned to blood. But Jesus brought “the law of the Spirit of life” (Rom. 8:2b). The water turned to wine is a picture of the redemption that is ours through Christ. “For the wages of sin is death,” says Romans 6:23, “but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” The water turned to wine is a picture of the new birth, when our earthen vessel is filled with the Spirit of Christ.

The purpose of a miracle is always greater than the temporal benefit it provides. Miracles are a declaration of eternal truth inscribed by the power of his might. God provides the revelation and the power. He provides all the requirements for a miracle except one – obedience to his command. That part is left to you and me.



## 40.

### *THE GIFTS OF HEALING*

## THAT THOU MAYEST PROSPER AND BE IN HEALTH

The traditional Maasai diet does not include fish. Even today many Maasai people find the thought of eating fish rather disgusting. I realized this in full as I was presenting the story of the fishes and the loaves in one of their villages. The looks on their faces told me they were not sure if Jesus was blessing or cursing the people that day! Personally I enjoy eating fish very much, but if I were to present my Maasai friends with a basket of fresh *tilapia*, my gift would not be well received. I might even offend them. What is pleasing to one is not necessarily pleasing to another.

In Isaiah's day, the priests thought that their rituals pleased God. They were wrong. God is never happy when worship becomes absent-minded routine. "Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me," said the Lord, "I am weary to bear them" (Isa. 1:14). God does not want to occupy our time. He wants to occupy our heart.

Colossians 1:10 exhorts Christians to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." It is our duty to conduct our lives in a way that most pleases the Lord. But before we can ever please our heavenly Father, we must first know what brings him joy.

GOD'S GREATEST WISH, JOY, AND FRUSTRATION

God's greatest wish is for the wellbeing of his people.

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. (3 John 1:2)

We wish for those things that we *desire* but cannot *demand*. God "hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant" (Ps. 35:27), but it is beyond his jurisdiction to ordain such prosperity. God's own precepts dictate that his children must walk in truth in order to prosper and be in health. That is why God has no greater joy than to hear that his children walk in truth. As we walk in truth we will prosper, fulfilling God's greatest wish.

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. (3 John 1:4)

It is impossible to walk in truth and *not* prosper and be in health. These two truths are inseparable, as can be seen in God's charge to Joshua:

Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it *to* the right hand or *to* the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. (Joshua 1:7-8)

So long as Joshua followed the straight and narrow way, so long as he walked in truth, he would prosper wherever he went. What was true for Joshua is true for all God's people. Walking in truth guarantees good success in our lives, which is God's greatest desire for his children.

Knowing God's greatest wish and joy, we can appreciate his greatest *frustration*.

And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you. (2 Chronicles 24:20)

Since nothing gives God more pleasure than to do good for his children, there is nothing that gives him more pain than to withhold

his goodness from them. Yet this is his obligation when we transgress his commandments. It is his righteous duty to forsake us when we forsake him, and leave us to reap what we have sown.

Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that *it is* an evil *thing* and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear *is* not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts. (Jeremiah 2:19)

Health and prosperity are not the birthright of the children of God. They are the rewards of righteous living. We will enjoy the blessing of his shelter so long as we abide under the shadow of his wings.

How excellent *is* thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee *is* the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light. (Psalm 36:7–9)

When we keep his commandments, we fulfil both his joy and our own.

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full. (John 15:10–11).

God's love toward man is unconditional but his blessing comes with *abiding* in that love. Our welfare is not determined by God's love for us but by our love for him. God can only "wish above all things" that his children prosper and be in health, in the same way that he desires for "all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

## FORGIVENESS, REMISSION OF SIN, AND HEALING

The blood of Jesus paid for the sins of mankind throughout all generations: past, present, and future. "He is the propitiation for our sins," says 1 John 2:2, "and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." No further payment is required. Why then are not all men saved? The Messiah "was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5). Why then do people suffer from sickness and disease? Isaiah answers both questions.

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear. (Isaiah 59:1–2)

In and of itself, sin is not the problem. The problem is man's lack of remorse for sin. Remorse is sorrow for sin, and "godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10). Without remorse, there is no repentance. Without repentance, there is no forgiveness of sin. Without forgiveness of sin, there is no healing.

The rebelliousness that plagued Judah in her last days is rampant in society today. The Judeans were not even embarrassed, much less ashamed, when they were confronted with the evil of their deeds. They became indignant when Jeremiah told them to change their ways.

Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 8:12)

Some people want a remedy for the consequence of sin without repenting of the deed itself. Just as there is no forgiveness for an unrepented sin, there is sickness that no medicine can cure.

Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow *is* incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: *because* thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. (Jeremiah 30:15)

See now that I, *even* I, *am* he, and *there is* no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither *is there any* that can deliver out of my hand. (Deuteronomy 32:39)

Imagine that you built a brick wall and told me, "Do not run head first into that wall or you will hurt yourself." For whatever reason – maybe just to prove you wrong – I run with all my might straight into that wall. Crack goes my skull! Now, you did not cause my demise. In fact, you tried to save me from my foolishness. But you did *build* the wall. In that sense the Lord says, "I have done these things unto thee." God established the laws of life. There is consequence to pay when men break those laws.

The unrepented sins of Judah left her sick without remedy. The same calamity can beset people today. Though the Lord is rich in mercy, his patience can be exhausted. A person can run out of second chances.

## THAT THOU MAYEST PROSPER AND BE IN HEALTH

Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, *yet* my mind *could* not *be* toward this people: cast *them* out of my sight, and let them go forth. (Jeremiah 15:1)

Even those who seek to please God will stumble along the way because of “the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb. 12:1). It is infuriating how easily sin achieves its goal! The more we endeavor to walk in truth and godliness, the more we will be confronted with the depth of our innate wickedness. True indeed are the Psalmist’s words, “If thou, LORD, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Ps. 130:3). Praise God, there is a way out of the miry pit of sin.

But *there is* forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. (Psalm 130:4)

Jesus said, “God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John 3:17). The Son of God did not come to punish the world but rather “to call sinners to repentance” (Matt. 9:13). With repentance there is forgiveness, and with forgiveness there is healing.

Return, ye backsliding children, *and* I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou *art* the LORD our God. (Jeremiah 3:22)

Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. (Hosea 6:1)

As we begin to study the final spiritual gift, the gifts of healing, let us remember that first and foremost, a healing is a gift of mercy from a loving God who desires only good things for his children. A gift of healing is a promise of a new beginning. That is what Christianity is all about.



## 41.

### *THE GIFTS OF HEALING*

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COME NIGH UNTO YOU

When Jesus ministered to the Hebrews of his day, it was plain to see that his word had power. What was so remarkable was how he *used* his power. As Peter later testified, Jesus “went about doing good.”

How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. (Acts 10:38)

Jesus demonstrated that God was not only almighty but also full of good will to men. God’s superior power made him answerable to no one, yet he showed himself to be full of love and mercy. How different he was from those who used the little power they had to their own advantage. In word and deed, Jesus showed that God did not send his Son to enslave men but to liberate them.

The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised .... (Luke 4:18)

The ministry of Christ was a vivid portrayal of Psalm 107:20: “He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their de-

structions.” Jesus preached the Gospel and healed the sick. For Jesus, it was inconceivable to do one and leave the other undone.

And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. (Matthew 9:35)

When Jesus called his disciples, he commissioned them to the same two-fold task.

Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. (Luke 9:1–2)

It is the goodness of God that leads men to repentance (Rom. 2:4). There is no greater evidence of the goodness of God than a healing done in his name. “Doing good” is the best way – the hallowed way – to win souls for the Lord. Healing the sick is God’s chosen way to exhibit his good will toward men, and bring them to the threshold of his everlasting kingdom.

And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. (Luke 10:9)

### THE SIGN AND THE WONDER OF HEALING

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous,” says Psalm 34:19, “but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.” Truly the Lord has compassion towards “the affliction of the afflicted.”

For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. (Psalm 22:24)

The spiritual gift called *the gifts of healing* is power against afflictors, both natural and spiritual, and remedy for our afflictions. It is the ability God gives whereby you can cast out unclean spirits and heal all manner of sickness and disease, according to the revelation you have received from God. This is the same spiritual ability that Jesus gave his apostles before he sent them out.

And when he had called unto *him* his twelve disciples, he gave them power *against* unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. (Matthew 10:1)

Like the gift of tongues, this gift is stated in the plural form (see 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30). However, it is not called the gift of *healings*,



but the *gifts* of healing. The ability to minister healing is a gift to the minister; the healing itself is a gift to the one in need.

Like a miracle, a healing is a wonder and a sign. It is a *wonder* when the human condition is improved by a spoken word.

The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. (Matthew 8:8)

Then saith he to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched *it* forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other. (Matthew 12:13)

And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word *is* this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. (Luke 4:36)

The *sign* or significance of a healing far outweighs the momentary wonder. A gift of healing is tangible evidence of the goodness of God and his life-giving power. It is proof of the quickening that occurred when Jesus arose from the dead. Since Jesus said, "Because I live, ye shall live also" (John 14:19), healing is also a sign to believers of our resurrection with him.

But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. (Romans 8:11)

Sickness is a by-product of our mortality; it is death *in part*. Conversely, healing is a quickening in part by the Spirit of God that dwells in you. A gift of healing is a token of eternal life. When your physical condition is improved in a moment of time, this foreshadows what will happen when "in the twinkling of an eye" (as the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15:52), "the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:54)

### THE CURSE CAUSELESS SHALL NOT COME

Two kinds of afflicters – natural and supernatural – seek to trouble us so long as we abide in these earthen vessels in this crooked and perverse world. We register our afflictions as mental and/or physical pain. However, we cannot know the nature of our afflicters simply by

the symptoms they produce. The effects we feel do not disclose the *cause* of our distress. Whether the curse (that is to say, the affliction) is mental or physical, “the curse causeless shall not come” (Prov. 26:2). Our afflicters can be natural or spiritual. Natural afflicters are sicknesses and diseases. Spiritual afflicters are unclean spirits.

Healing is the power to rid the body of the natural and spiritual intruders that cause physical and spiritual sickness. Biblically, there is little difference in being infected by a virus or possessed by a devil. In either case, the intruder must be cast out. Only then can health be restored.

Evil spirits and viruses are both parasitical in nature. A parasite is entirely self-serving; it has no capacity for remorse. An evil spirit or disease has no more regard for the person it possesses than a termite does for the house it consumes. They do not come to punish; they come to feed. Natural and spiritual parasites exist only to steal, to kill, and to destroy. Once they find a host, they will not voluntarily leave until there is nothing left for them to feed upon.

Unclean spirits seek residence within a man’s mind and body. They want to possess him in the same way a man possesses a house. Jesus taught that an unclean spirit thinks of the person it possesses as “my house.” It has no more desire to be homeless than you or I.

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. (Luke 11:24)

Whether the cause is physical or spiritual, to eliminate the cause of the problem is to do a *cure*. Jesus said, “Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures” (Luke 13:32).

And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour. (Matthew 17:18)

And in that same hour he cured many of *their* infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many *that were* blind he gave sight. (Luke 7:21)

## THE FINGER OF GOD

The ministry of casting out devils is not found in the Old Testament. It is true that an evil spirit departed from King Saul when David played his harp (see 1 Samuel 16:23), but there is no indication that David did this with intention. Jesus was the first man to ever cast out a devil with a word. This amazed all the people that heard of it. “What new doctrine is this?” they asked, “for with authority commandeth he

## THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS COME NIGH UNTO YOU

even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him” (Mark 1:27). As a result, some of the Pharisees accused Christ of being an exorcist.

But when the Pharisees heard *it*, they said, This *fellow* doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. (Matthew 12:24)

In an exorcism, sorcerers call upon powerful evil spirits to expel weaker ones. Sadly, an exorcism is nothing more than an elaborate deception. One devil moves out and another more powerful moves in. Satan’s stronghold is reinforced, and the desperate person is left worse off than before.

In response to their unspoken accusations, Jesus let the Pharisees know that “the prince of the devils” would never compromise his own work.

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? (vv. 25–26)

He also let them know that *he* knew they were guilty of the very thing they accused him of.

And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast *them* out? therefore they shall be your judges. But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. (vv. 27–28)

Once again, the parallel between physical and spiritual deliverance is clear. Whether we heal the sick or cast out devils, we can say, “the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”

Jesus did not cast out devils with sorcery. He cast them out by the Spirit of God. All the power needed to cast out a devil was found in a flick of God’s finger.

But if I with the finger of God cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you. (Luke 11:20)

A laundry product sold in America claims to *shout out* stains. I have been to prayer meetings in which the person in charge seems to think he can shout out the devil! He screams into the microphone, ordering the devil to “get out in the name of Jesus!” Does he think that volume increases power? Does he think that Satan is hearing-impaired?

When my daughter Jessica was only ten years old, she faced a

situation from which many adults would recoil. She became aware that her playmate, a girl even younger than she, had been possessed by satanic powers. There were no adults around to ask for help. By a revelation of the discerning of spirits, Jessica knew that an army of evil spirits had invaded the girl's mind. She commanded them to leave in the name of Jesus Christ, but they refused. "We're not leaving!" said the devils with an audible growl. "Oh yes, you are!" said Jessica, and she cast them out. The child was set free.

How did a ten-year-old child win a battle against an army of unclean spirits who have been handily bedeviling one generation after another since the fall of Lucifer? Jessica stood her ground because she stood on the Rock. She fought them in the power of *his* might. With the finger of God, she cast out devils.

### IN MY NAME SHALL THEY CAST OUT DEVILS

In Mark 16:17, Jesus promises, "In my name shall they cast out devils." But the name of Jesus is not a magic invocation. There is nothing about the sound of the name that causes devils to flee, no matter how loudly it is voiced.

Because of Mexico's strong Catholic tradition, there are many Mexican families with sons named Jesus (pronounced *Hay-soos*). Imagine what it sounds like every evening when the *mamás* call their *niños* home to supper. *Jesus! Jesus!* If the sound of the name was all that it took, the devils would have fled Mexico long ago. There is power in the name of Jesus, not in the sound of his name. The vagabond Jews of Acts 19 learned this lesson the hard way!

Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of *one* Sceva, a Jew, *and* chief of the priests, which did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. (Acts 19:13-16)

These exorcists foolishly believed that Jesus could be summoned like one of their familiar spirits. The evil spirit knew these men were not representing the Kingdom of Christ. It had no reason to obey them.

Some Christians foolishly tell devils to vacate places they have every right to remain. Remember, devils are "the rulers of the dark-

ness of this world” (Eph. 6:12). You cannot cast devils out of darkness – darkness is their domain. You can only cast them from places they trespass. When a man commits his way to the Lord, the devils must give way. Their only hope is to lure him back into the darkness. If they succeed, they have every right to assault him.

In the pursuit of wild game, some men hunt with rifles or bows, and others set traps. A hunter must stalk his prey, but a trapper can go home as soon as he has set his traps. His prey finds its own way into the trap. All he needs to do is return to collect what he has snared.

Devils are experts at setting traps. They do not lie in wait outside gambling halls, for example, ready to club someone over the head and drag him inside. They scent their traps to arouse man’s lust, and “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16) does all the work for them. There are many ways to ensnare a man, and Satan knows them all. So long as a man is held in a trap, the devil is satisfied. If the man is unsaved, he will not seek salvation. If he is a Christian, he will do nothing for the Lord and he will be a stumbling block to other believers. Meanwhile, the devils are free to cause trouble elsewhere.

There is nothing the Lord can do for a man who is satisfied to dwell in darkness. He cannot club him over the head and drag him into the light. Jesus came to help man *escape* the powers of darkness. But even a glimmer of light is enough to kindle man’s desire for freedom. Then the sentiment of the Psalmist will be his as well: “I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies” (Ps. 18:3).

## HEALING AND DELIVERANCE

God has granted his ministers the authority to stand in the power of his might to rescue those who seek an exodus from the kingdom of darkness. No matter what power tries to resist us, God has “increased his people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies” (Ps. 105:24). When we are strong in his might, we have power and authority over all devils and diseases.

Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases.  
(Luke 9:1)

When we are strong in the Lord, we have the power to tread over all the power of the enemy.

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. (Luke 10:19)

However, let us not be drunk on the wine of this power. The Bible reminds us that life is not a sporting event.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour .... (1 Peter 5:8)

Devils and diseases surrender to the Lord's command, not yours. "Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?" Only by the revealed word can you "cast out all thine enemies from before thee, as the LORD hath spoken" (Deut. 6:19).

## 42.

### *THE GIFTS OF HEALING*

## THE POWER OF THE LORD WAS PRESENT TO HEAL

Jesus said that one of the signs that “shall follow them that believe” was “they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:17–18). Examining this single passage could lead to the assumption that a miracle of healing is guaranteed every time someone has the boldness to lay hands on the sick. But even Jesus could not simply impose his good will on others. Mark 6:5 testifies that while he was in Capernaum, “he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.” What hindered the Lord’s work? Verse 6 says, “And he marvelled because of their unbelief.”

Through my years of ministry, I have laid hands on hundreds of people in need of physical and spiritual deliverance. Believers have laid hands on me in my own times of need as well. I know the joy of witnessing complete and instantaneous healing for others and for myself. I know by experience that what Jesus said is true. On the other hand, I have known the disappointment of seeing people unchanged after I ministered to them. There have been times when I myself did not respond to prayers for my recovery as I hoped I might. These inconsistencies perturbed me. What accounted for these seemingly random successes and failures?

One day I was reading the Bible and a verse seemed to jump off the page:

And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was *present* to heal them. (Luke 5:17)

If that day “the power of the Lord was present to heal them,” there must have been other occasions when it was *not* present. What conditions must be met in order for the power of the Lord to be present?

### EVANGELISTIC HEALINGS

In a number of biblical records of deliverance, nothing is required of the person in need except simple obedience. This is very evident in the story of the healing of the man born blind.

And as *Jesus* passed by, he saw a man which was blind from *his* birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? (John 9:1–2)

Psalm 51:5 says, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” This verse does not condemn the act of conception but rather confirms the truth that all men are born dead in trespasses and sins. The disciples were not suggesting that this man’s physical blindness had been caused by his sinful condition. They were suggesting that he had committed an act of sin before he was born (though one must wonder how such a thing might be possible). To the disciples, the only other possibility was to accuse the parents. Undoubtedly they too wanted to know the cause of this birth defect. Had something gone awry during the pregnancy? Was God angry with them? Had they been cursed? Jesus put an end to their wondering once and for all.

Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. (v. 3)

This man was born blind for one reason – to be healed by Jesus. Neither Satan, sin, nor circumstance had caused this malady. This man was a chosen vessel for God’s glory. Jesus said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world” (vv. 4–5).

When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man



with the clay, And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing. (vv. 6–7)

Like Naaman in the days of Elisha, this man did as he was told. However, his obedience can hardly be called faith in God. He did not know who Jesus was. When the Pharisees later questioned him about Jesus, he said, “Whether he be a sinner or no, I know not: one thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see” (v. 25). This healing was not about the faith of the blind man. The events of that day transcended the significance of the unnamed man who saw for the first time. Though others aforesaid had done many of the same miracles Jesus did, no one had ever opened the eyes of the blind. That work was reserved for the Messiah. Even the once-blind man himself knew that this was a very special miracle. “Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind,” he said (v. 32). The closest anyone came to doing such a thing was when Elisha prayed that God would open (that is to say *reopen*) the eyes of the Syrian army after he had first “prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha” (2 Kings 6:18).

The healing of the man born blind is an example of an evangelistic healing – the kind of healing most frequently recorded in the Gospels and in the book of Acts. Such healings say nothing about the faith of the recipient, for the recipient is yet unsaved. Such a healing is used by God to call people to his kingdom. In modern times these healings are most often witnessed in evangelistic campaigns to third-world countries. It is not (as some people surmise) that such people have more faith than we in the West. The fact is, the West has been sufficiently evangelized. Now we need to learn to walk in truth.

I am not saying that there is no healing for the saved. The Bible and my personal experience prove otherwise. However, when we realize that the *primary* reason for healing is not the maintenance of the human body but spiritual awakening, a lot of questions are put to rest. Some things in life must be endured. That is why Paul (who understood healing better than any of us) could say, “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong” (1 Cor. 12:10).

### THE HEALING OF THE MAN SICK OF THE PALSY

The statement that “the power of the Lord was present to heal” is found in the record of the healing of the man sick with palsy. This

account is featured in three of the four Gospels: in Matthew chapter 9, Mark chapter 2 and Luke chapter 5. All three records suggest that this event occurred fairly early in Jesus' ministry; for the calling out of Levi – also known as Matthew – immediately follows.

By consulting all three records, we can discover the circumstances that surrounded this healing. Matthew 9:1 states that Jesus had come into “his own city.” Mark identifies this city as Capernaum, and tells us that “he preached the word unto them.”

And again he entered into Capernaum after *some* days; and it was noised that he was in the house. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive *them*, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them. (Mark 2:1-2)

From Luke 5:17, we learn that Jesus was not only preaching, “he was teaching,” and “there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by.” But what was his message? What was his message that day and every day? “I must preach the kingdom of God,” he said in Luke 4:43, “for therefore am I sent.” Matthew 4:17 says, “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand,” he said. “Repent ye, and believe the gospel” (Mark 1:15). As Jesus later said on the road to Emmaus, he had come “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). The road to forgiveness begins with repentance. This was his message that day in Capernaum as well.

And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought *means* to bring him in, and to lay *him* before him. And when they could not find by what *way* they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with *his* couch into the midst before Jesus. (Luke 5:18-19)

Verse 20 says, “And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.” It was not the faith of the sick man only that impressed Jesus, but the faith of his friends as well. That he “saw their faith” had to be a revelation. But from what we have learned so far, what is it that they believed? Did the sick man have faith to be healed? If so, Jesus gave him a very strange answer. Jesus had been teaching the people to repent and believe the Gospel. The words of truth had found their mark in the hearts of these men. They had repented of their sins. When Jesus saw this he said, “Man,

thy sins are forgiven thee.”

The scribes and the Pharisees were incensed. “Who can forgive sins, but God alone?” they said within themselves (v. 21). Had they realized who was standing before them, they would have realized they had answered their own question! Jesus responded to them as if they had voiced their thoughts for all to hear.

But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. (vv. 22–24)

Herein is an amazing truth. Healing is a token of forgiveness from God. Like forgiveness, healing is a gift of mercy. Upon our repentance we are given a new beginning. Our sins are blotted out as though they never occurred. A gift of healing is a tangible token of a fresh beginning.

Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord ... (Acts 3:19)

The man sick with palsy had repented. He had believed and received remission of his sins. This miraculous healing was evidence of his forgiveness. He had been refreshed in the presence of the Lord.

Jesus began his sentence, speaking to the religious dignitaries. “That ye [you, scribes and Pharisees] may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins,” he said. Then he continued, turning to the bed-ridden man, “I say unto thee [you, sick with palsy], Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house” (Luke 5:24).

And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day. (vv. 25–26)

A gift of healing is a token of forgiveness to all that repent and believe. Forgiveness of sin and healing go hand in hand.

I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee. (Psalm 41:4)

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases ... (Psalm 103:2–3)

## IN THE POWER OF HIS MIGHT

What can we say to these things? Where there is the anointed Word of God presented with power, love, and compassion; and where there are hearts turned to the Lord in repentance, the power of the Lord will be present to heal. The Bible declares this truth, and historical accounts of miraculous healings in revival tents and mission fields around the world confirm it. Praise, honor, and glory to the one who makes such things possible.

## 43.

### THE GIFTS OF HEALING

### FAITH TO BE HEALED

Evangelistic healings demonstrate the power, love, and tender mercies of our heavenly Father to those who do not know him. Faith in God cannot be required to receive healings like this because the recipients do not yet have faith. The Syrian captain Naaman believed in the God of Israel *after* he was cleansed of leprosy, not before.

And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that *there is* no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant. (2 Kings 5:15)

Naaman was clearly skeptical that dipping in the Jordan River would accomplish anything, but still he did as he was told. In order to receive anything from God, one must at least be willing to obey his directive. (An exception is made when someone is mentally incapacitated or, of course, deceased.) When Peter and John healed the lame man at the gate of the temple, the beggar's only contribution to the healing was his obedience to Peter's instruction.

All day, every day, the lame man sat at the temple gate, his cupped hand extended upward as he asked alms from the passers-by. "Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple," says Acts 3:3, the beggar asked an alms of them as well.

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. (vv. 4–5)

He was not expecting much, perhaps a few tokens of pity. Looking into his eyes, Peter spoke again. “Silver and gold have I none,” he began, and before the beggar could register his disappointment, Peter reached out his hand to him and said, “But such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (v. 6).

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted *him* up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. (vv. 7–8)

There is no indication that this man had any faith at all until Peter lifted him to his feet and his legs miraculously held. When we read that the by-standers “were filled with wonder and amazement” (v. 10), we can be sure that the beggar was the most amazed of them all.

Peter accepted no credit for the wonder that was done. This healing, he said, was not “by our own power or holiness” (v. 12), but rather, “faith in his name hath made this man strong” (v. 16). It was Peter and John – and not the lame man – who had faith in the name of Jesus Christ. But let us be clear – their *faith* did not heal this man. The *Lord* healed him. Peter and John ministered healing in the power of his might.

Just as Elisha knew to tell Naaman to wash in the Jordan, Peter knew to tell the lame man, “Look on us.” The beggar himself contributed no more faith than the young man of Nain who was raised from the dead during his own funeral.

And he [Jesus] came and touched the bier: and they that bare *him* stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother. (Luke 7:14–15)

### THY FAITH HATH MADE THEE WHOLE

Faith for healing is not expected from those who do not know the Lord. But what is expected of a believer? From those that have faith, faith is required. The woman who was healed when she touched the hem of Christ’s garment was a believer, a “daughter” of Abraham. Jesus said her faith had made her whole.

For she said within herself, If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole. But Jesus turned him about, and when he saw

her, he said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. (Matthew 9:21–22)

Her faith made her whole, but where was her faith directed? Her faith was in Jesus, not in the robe he wore. She knew that all she needed was the Master's touch.

Paul and Barnabas were in the middle of a very difficult missionary journey when they arrived at Lystra, a Gentile city in the region of modern-day Turkey.

And there they preached the gospel. And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked .... (Acts 14:7–8)

Like the lame man at the temple gate, this man had never walked. He had come to hear Paul speak and he was very receptive to the Word of the Lord. All the while Paul was speaking, the Lord was speaking to this man as well.

The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. (vv. 9–10)

Upon hearing the gospel of God, this man had faith to be healed. Romans 10:17 says, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Paul did not lift him to his feet as Peter did the beggar in Jerusalem. The Bible does not say that Paul even touched him, but God certainly did. This man's faith was in God, not in Paul. By faith in God, he himself stood up.

### DRAW NIGH TO GOD, AND HE WILL DRAW NIGH TO YOU

In evangelistic healings, the door to deliverance hinges upon simple obedience. For the believer, this door hinges upon a spiritual awakening as he draws close to God.

Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *ye* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *ye* double minded. (James 4:8)

Only Jesus can cleanse our hands and purify our hearts. Cleansing, like healing, comes with forgiveness of sin.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Just as the Kingdom of God drew nigh to us, now we must draw nigh to the Kingdom. We draw near to God by drawing near to the

cross of Christ.

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls. (1 Peter 2:24–25)

Many people fail to seek the Lord's healing because they feel unworthy of his goodness. They are correct! They are *not* worthy. We deserve healing no more than we deserved salvation. Healing is a gift, not a reward. It is evidence of God's goodness, not ours.

He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (Romans 8:32)

We receive our healing just as we received Christ, with love and thankfulness.

Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou *art* my praise. (Jeremiah 17:14)

You could well say, "For by grace are ye *healed* through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."

O LORD my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me. O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. (Psalm 30:2–3)

We must draw nigh to God to enter his healing presence. You will find faith for healing when your eyes are open to see the love of Jesus that led him to the cross to die for you. "Faith," says Galatians 5:6, "worketh by love."

When Jesus offered to follow the centurion home to pray for his servant, the military man said, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed" (Matt. 8:8). You too will be healed when you hear the Lord whisper his word into your heart, "Dearly beloved, I make you whole."

### PRAYER FOR THE SICK

The fifth chapter of James speaks to three conditions of a believer's heart:

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord .... (James 5:13–14)



At times we are afflicted and at times we are merry. There are also times when we are sick. I daresay that in any sizeable gathering of Christians you will find evidence of all three conditions.

There are some challenges in life that cannot be shared with other people. "Every man shall bear his own burden," says Galatians 6:5. Of course that does not mean we must bear them alone. When a believer suffers from affliction, James 5:13 says, "let him pray." Pray for strength in your day of adversity, knowing that "the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world" (1 Pet. 5:9).

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle *you*. (v. 10)

When happiness has occasion to visit our lives, we should welcome her with songs of praise and joy. Proverbs 17:22 says, "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine." But there will also be times when we suffer with sickness. In such times, we must remember that we do not have to face every challenge alone. "Bear ye one another's burdens," says Galatians 6:2, "and so fulfil the law of Christ." Ironically, there are people who are quick to help their brother bear his burden, but have trouble asking others to help them bear their own. A believer in need of healing should not hesitate to ask the elders of the church to pray over him, "anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord" as the twelve disciples did when they prayed for the sick.

And they went out, and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed *them*. (Mark 6:12-13)

The anointing with oil is a figure of the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "Without me ye can do nothing," and that is certainly true whether we pray for the sick or seek healing ourselves. Of course, there is no more healing power in oil than there was in Christ's robe. Its use in the healing ministry is symbolic, like the cup and bread of Holy Communion, or the water in Christian baptism. The material substance symbolizes something that cannot be sensually evidenced.

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:15-16)

Again, we see the indisputable relationship of forgiveness of sin and healing. God alone can forgive sin. Only he can heal. We may be

instruments of his healing, but without him, we can do nothing. What Peter said to the man sick with palsy is true every time someone is healed in the name of the Lord: “Jesus Christ maketh thee whole.”

And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. (Acts 9:33–34)

Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). There is no occasion when this is truer than during prayer for the sick. That is why elders are to lay hands on the sick. We lay hands on the sick in the behalf and in the name of Jesus Christ, knowing he is there with us. “They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:18).

### THE HEALING MINISTRY

To effectively present the Scriptures, one must do more than talk about the Bible; he must minister the Word of God to his people. That a man can minister the Word in no way insinuates that the Word originated from him. The same is true in the ministry of healing. We can minister healing, but the healing does not come from us. We minister in the name of Jesus Christ. We are his ambassadors, the agents of his will.

To minister in the name of Jesus is to do exactly what he wants done. Our reliance is in him and not in technique. There is no step-by-step process that guarantees effectiveness. Every situation we face is unique and nothing can replace the Lord’s guidance.

Prayers for the sick are not limited to prayers of understanding. Sometimes God will reveal the person’s need to you by a word of knowledge. At other times the person himself must tell you his need, often in confession of sin. How do you know what to do? Wisdom is profitable to direct!

The Lord may direct you to search out the cause of the affliction. “The cause which I knew not I searched out,” says Job 29:16. A revelation of discerning of spirits tells you if the problem is natural or supernatural. Should you discover the presence of an evil spirit or disease, a word of wisdom is needed to direct your next move. Never assume that you know the right thing to do. Minister *with* the Lord.

In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. (Proverbs 3:6–7)

Obviously, the cause of an affliction cannot always be cast out. If a man has a broken leg, we cannot break the laws of time to erase this event from his life. Many times the cause of our afflictions can be traced to something that happened in our past.

In the case of an injury, that which was broken must be rebuilt. In the case of a birth defect, that which is deficient must be supplied. No matter what path it takes, the end of healing is wholeness. Healings like these were frequently seen in the Gospel time as well as in the era of the book of Acts.

Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see: and they glorified the God of Israel.  
(Matthew 15:31)

For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed *with them*: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. (Acts 8:7-8)

I was invited to preach in a Methodist church in a rural town in Ohio, in the United States. When the main service was over, the pastor invited me to pray for the sick. One of the first people to come forward was an elderly Caucasian woman. As I began to pray for her, I received a word of knowledge that she had problems in her spine. This she confirmed. I received another revelation that the cause of her problems was rooted in her damaged feet. I told her about an aged Chinese woman I met in my childhood. She had been crippled by the since-outlawed tradition of binding a young girl's feet so that they would appear petite even in adulthood. Of course the feet continue to grow, but not as nature intended. I told the woman I was praying for, that such a thing had happened to her in her own childhood, that it had permanently altered her stride and distorted her spine.

Now, this woman may never have been to a Chinese restaurant, much less the People's Republic. When I was finished praying, she gave me a look that seemed to say, *You look like a nice man. You have no idea what you are talking about but you do seem sincere.* She returned to her seat and I began to pray for the next person in line.

Months went by before I heard the rest of the story. She drove herself home from church, puzzling over the story I had told her, when suddenly tears flooded her eyes and she had to pull over to the side of the road. The memory of a long-forgotten event from her childhood came rushing back. Her mother was concerned that her daughter's

feet might grow too large. Hoping to prevent this from happening, she always dressed her in shoes that were too small for her feet. This not only caused the little girl much pain, but it also led to further problems. She had not thought of this for many, many years. Moreover, she was absolutely sure that I knew nothing about it. God reached out and touched her in a wonderful way that day.

No evil spirit or disease was bothering her. The cause of her problem was something that happened in her past. There was nothing to cast out. Her need was to be made whole.

### THE HEALING VIRTUE OF CHRIST

The removal of an evil spirit or disease from its host makes way for the restoration of the body and mind. Once the cause is removed, the body can be made whole. In Mark 5, a woman was restored to wholeness after her body was cured of a debilitating plague.

And a certain woman, which had an issue of blood twelve years,  
And had suffered many things of many physicians, and had  
spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather  
grew worse .... (Mark 5:25-26)

Though a throng of people separated her from the Lord, she pressed forward to touch him.

When she had heard of Jesus, came in the press behind, and touched his garment. For she said, If I may touch but his clothes, I shall be whole. And straightway the fountain of her blood was dried up; and she felt in *her* body that she was healed of that plague. (vv. 27-29)

Something marvelous had occurred to procure her healing. She had been touched by the healing virtue of Christ.

And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes? (v. 30)

This disease had been hastening her towards an early death, but her faith was in the Lord. She knew that her deliverance rested in drawing nigh to him. For this woman, her Red Sea was a crowd of people separating her from the Lord. For you and me, it can be a raging sea of contrary thoughts that must be parted before we can reach him. She was not disappointed in her expectation. In a moment of time, the cause was removed and she was restored to wholeness. "Thy faith hath made thee whole," said Jesus. "Go in peace, and be whole of thy plague" (v. 34). Let us pray to follow her example of per-

severance in our hour of testing.

With every healing, Jesus imparts his healing power, his *virtue*.

And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed *them* all. (Luke 6:19)

As you minister to the sick, you may or may not recognize when this happens. Do not fall into the trap of seeking physical sensations as proof of spiritual realities. One thing is for sure – the virtue is of God and not of us. Nowhere in the Bible do we read that Jesus willed this virtue to be released from his body into another. He only recognized the fact that such a thing had occurred.

The book of Acts records a similar event in the ministry of Paul, although the Bible takes care to designate it as a *special* miracle.

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. (Acts 19:11–12)

Of course, it was not the virtue of Paul that caused these wonders. Paul was a flawed human being just like you and me. But Paul walked in the power of the Lord's might, and whatever extra the Lord wanted to provide, he provided. To be sure, Paul was blessed with a double portion of the virtue of Christ in those days.

### A GIFT OF TIME

A healing is a gift of mercy and forgiveness. It is evidence of the Lord's compassion toward his people.

And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. (Matthew 14:14)

For many, it is a gift of time, as it was for Hezekiah.

Go, and say to Hezekiah, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will add unto thy days fifteen years. (Isaiah 38:5)

A man I had never met telephoned me, asking for prayer. The disease in his blood was so advanced that his doctor had given him only a few days to live. I did my best to speak peace into his heart, and to minister to his condition. Together we sought the Lord for his mercies. Very soon afterward I heard the wonderful news. A new test showed that the disease had vanished. His health was restored. Even his doctor, who was not a believer, called it a miracle.

(Let me say that I was not the only person to pray for this brother. But even if that were true, it would not mean that I healed him. God healed our brother.)

Almost a year later, I met him face to face. I asked him if he had ever sought the Lord to ask why he had been given this gift of time, this extension of life. He told me he had never thought of that, but he promised he would.

I never spoke to him again, and about a year later I learned that he had passed away. But what a difference was made in the time he was given! He had been a wild and selfish man for many years before he came to Christ. He had abandoned his wife and young children along the way. Now his children were grown, scarred by the bitter memories of a father who was not there. After his healing he sought the Lord, and with his help he reached out to those he had caused such pain to ask their forgiveness. He died with his family by his side and peace in his heart.

There are many foolish accusations against the gifts of healing, but none is quite so ridiculous as the claim that if a healing is genuinely from God, it should be *permanent*. If that is true, then Lazarus should still be walking around today. Healing is only a taste of eternal life, a token to help us draw closer to God. Like the man healed at the pool of Bethesda, we are expected to make the most of the opportunity that a healing provides.

Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. (John 5:14)

The witness of a healing – whether the immediate benefactor was you or someone else – erases all your excuses before God. You have seen his goodness and power, his compassion and love. Will you respond with a renewed commitment to live your life to his good pleasure? Or will you harden your heart like the Pharaoh of long ago?

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.... (Romans 2:4–5)

To remain hardhearted after an encounter with the Almighty is not free of consequence.

Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee,

Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. (Matthew 11:20-22)

Other than the Word of God itself, there is no greater testimony of our heavenly Father and the salvation he gives than a healing done in his name. Every healing is a picture of everlasting life. Every healing makes known Christ in the way God wants him made known, in word and in power. A gift of healing is a gift of goodness and mercy, and gives entrance into the sanctuary of his eternal love.

“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils,” said Jesus (Matt. 10:8). We could not begin to participate in deliverance like this through our natural ability. But where the word of a king is, there is power. Exodus 15:26 declares, “I am the LORD that healeth thee.” Stand in the power of *his* might!





## EPILOGUE

### “THE CHIEFEST OF ALL”

James and John came to Jesus with a special request. “Master,” they said, “we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire” (Mark 10:35). We can almost admire their boldness. Many of us feel the same way – we are just not willing to admit it. Still, I wonder if Jesus was not a little amused as he asked, “What would ye that I should do for you?” (v. 36).

They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. (v.37)

Their second request made their first seem almost humble. James and John seemed more interested in sitting in their *own* glory than in his, but Jesus kindly answered their supplication. “To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give,” he said, “but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared” (v. 40).

James and John were not the only disciples who wanted the best seats in Beulah land. “And when the ten heard it,” says verse 41, “they began to be much displeased with James and John.” Did they think there would not be enough chairs for everyone? Jesus overlooked their pettiness and used the occasion to present them with a revolutionary teaching about the true path to greatness.

But Jesus called them *to him*, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. (vv. 42-44)

There was no question in their minds – Jesus was a great man, the chiefest among them. But only now was the veil lifted from their eyes so that they could appreciate what *made* him so great. “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,” said Jesus, “and to give his life a ransom for many” (v. 45). It was suddenly so clear to them – this is what set Jesus apart.

The ninth chapter of Luke tells of a very significant event in the lives of the Lord’s disciples. They had received power and authority the likes of which they could never have dreamed of before.

Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. (Luke 9:1-2)

Before they met Jesus, the lives of these men had been largely insignificant. Their days were consumed with the ordinary. Consider the life of Peter. Before he met the Lord, he was a fisherman. Every morning he woke up, prepared his equipment, and fished until it was time to quit. Then he went to bed. The next day, he woke up, prepared his equipment, and fished until it was time to quit. Then he went to bed. The next day, he woke up, prepared his ...

But now his heart was on fire. He was one of the Lord’s chosen apostles. They had power! They had authority! They were able to make a difference in the lives of the people around them. But what was their chief concern?

Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. (v. 46)

In a similar situation the disciples asked Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt. 18:1). Was it Moses of whom it is written, “there arose not a prophet since in Israel, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deut. 34:10)? What about David whom God called “a man after mine own heart” (Acts 13:22)?

And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall

receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great. (Luke 9:47-48)

Contrary to what people might think he should have done, Christ did not rebuke his disciples. He understood the nature of their question. What is it that makes a man's life truly significant? Jesus taught them the true path to greatness. "He that is least among you all, the same shall be great."

As is often the case with the Lord's disciples (both then and now), one hearing was not enough. Still, we can truly marvel at the inappropriate timing of the disciples' questions. There may never have been a more solemn moment in the history of mankind than the evening of the Last Supper.

And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:19-20)

The disciples hardly had time to consider the significance of what he said when Jesus declared another startling revelation:

But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me *is* with me on the table. And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined: but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed! (vv. 21-22)

You might suppose that upon hearing this terrible announcement, each apostle would excuse himself from the table and find a secluded place to pray, beseeching God that he would not be the one to betray the Master. But something else was on their minds. Something else was bothering them:

And they began to enquire among themselves, which of them it was that should do this thing. And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. (vv. 23-24)

One could easily imagine Jesus overturning the dinner table, just as he overturned the tables of the moneychangers at the temple. *I tell you that I will be broken and I will bleed for you! I tell you that one of you will betray me! And all you can think about is how you compare to others?* Jesus was never hesitant to chastise his disciples when necessary. But on their last night together, he took the opportunity once again to teach them about the path to greatness.

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them

are called benefactors. But ye *shall* not *be* so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether *is* greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? *is* not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth. (vv. 25–27)

There is nothing *unchristian* about wanting to live a great life. The problem is how we define greatness. By and large the Christian church has embraced a worldly interpretation of greatness. But there is a better way. Jesus said, “I am among you as he that serveth.”

We began these lessons in hope of learning how to run a good race and finish our course. We have seen that the nine gifts of the Spirit are God’s provision to equip us for this great challenge. We are strong when we stand in the power of his might. However, there is a *fail-safe* feature to the spiritual gifts to prevent the abuse of such power. Only the man who is yoked to the Master can properly brandish the weapons of our warfare.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke *is* easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:29–30)

True Christianity begins where selfishness ends. Until a man has vanquished worldly ambition, his religious service will be tainted by self-interest.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 16:24–25)

Self-promotion has no place in the church. He that is greatest among us considers himself the least of all.

Let nothing *be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (Philippians 2:3)

Jesus came into this world with the greatest birthright of all time. Nothing he accomplished on earth increased his already lofty stature. Everything he did was for our sake, not his.

There is that maketh himself rich, yet *hath* nothing: *there is* that maketh himself poor, yet *hath* great riches. (Proverbs 13:7)

For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich. (2 Corinthians 8:9)

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Jesus chose a life of servanthood. Though he was equal to God, he “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). Though he was very rich, he became poor for our sakes.

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name .... (vv. 8–9)

In the end, all men will be humble before God. The question is how we get there. We either humble ourselves or wait to be humbled by him. One way or another, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (vv. 10–11)

Those who exalt themselves will be brought low. Those who humble themselves will be exalted. As Jesus said, “The last shall be first, and the first last” (Matt. 20:16).

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of *you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time .... (1 Peter 5:5–6)

### THE FAST THAT I HAVE CHOSEN

Jesus said, “The good shepherd will give his life for his sheep” (John 10:11). This is the example all Christians should follow. This is true Christian ministry.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And *that* he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. (2 Corinthians 5:14–15)

Hereby perceive we the love of *God*, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. (1 John 3:16)

This is the reason we have been spared. This is the reason we have been anointed with such wonderful power. This is our reason for living, to partake in the chosen fast of the Lord.

*Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? (Isaiah 58:6-7)*

When we walk in the light of God, his righteousness will go before us and his glory will follow. This is the Christianity that springs forth from the pages of the Bible. This is the Lord who says, “Here I am!”

Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward. Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I *am* ... (vv. 8-9a)

There is so much that God wants to do for his children. One little word – *if* – makes it possible.

... If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity; And *if* thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness *be* as the noonday: And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. (vv. 9b-11)

Over the years I have presented the material in this book to people of various nations, cultures, and denominational affiliations. I have seen wonderful healings of the human body, more than I can remember. But nothing I have experienced has given me more joy than seeing the healing of a broken heart. People can serve God with broken bodies but not with broken spirits. Yet this does not have to be the end of the story. Jesus was sent to earth to heal the brokenhearted. When you and I stand in the power of his might, we can partake in this wonderful ministry.

And *they that shall be* of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. (v. 12)

I have been given many letters of appreciation from students in my classes, but if this was the only one I ever received, it would be more than enough to sustain me for a lifetime:

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I had spent the last ten years of my life trying to put my life back together and heal it from hurt and confusion that I had received, not from unbelievers but from “men of God.” The hurt and upset in my life was always there inside, although I didn’t feel bitter, the confusion and unrest over the waste of years striving to follow God was always there.

Within the week God had healed my heart. That sounds so simple to say. You do not need a letter stating all the stuff I went through. If people read this letter it sounds so simple to say. God healed my heart, healed it so I don’t feel confused, upset, scared, healed so at last I feel peace.

The class saved my life. What is the value of a life? I know it is God that did this... But thank you for giving your life to God so people like me could have their life back.

There is no honor so great, or satisfaction so complete, as can be found in serving the Lord.

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour. (John 12:26)

When we choose to live our lives in obedience to God and service to his people, we will have reason to “rejoice in the day of Christ,” knowing that we “have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain” (Phil. 2:16). I pray that these lessons will prove useful to you as you run the race that is set before you in service to our Lord. May God bless you always.

Blessed *is* that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. (Matthew 24:46)





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To the best of my ability, *In the Power of His Might* is not a work of fiction. The writing is mine but the subject matter belongs to God. To misrepresent God's Word is to lead people astray. Therefore I am in-

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