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Frank Winters

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*Fundamental
Truths of
Christianity*



By FRANK WINTERS

A. W. Kelley

*Fundamental Truths
of Christianity*



To my faithful wife, who has been my cheerful and untiring helper in the preparation of these lessons, this little volume is dedicated.—FRANK WINTERS

FOREWORD

This booklet contains fifty brief articles by Mr. Frank Winters, a Christian business man of Oklahoma City, who at the request of the congregations interested has undertaken the task of setting forth in concise and simple language the fundamentals of the Christian faith. That his purpose has been unusually successful will be manifest to all who read these short treatises.

As ministers of the gospel of Christ we have followed these articles with the keenest interest as they have appeared each week in newspapers of our city. We have found them to be unswervingly loyal to the teachings of Christ and faithful to the highest traditions of Christian journalism. They have set forth in a few pungent paragraphs some of the profoundest truths of our religion, penetrating through the fog of popular misinformation and denominational misconceptions with the swift clean stroke of a surgeon's knife, going unerringly to the very heart of the problems which so hamper the growth of the church in our day.

We commend these articles as a beautifully clear presentation, both in content and in spirit, of the plea of the churches of Christ. This booklet will be especially helpful if it be given a widespread distribution among the millions of honest people who are still bound by the errors of denominationalism, and who have not yet seen the glory of simple, undenominational Christianity. It will also prove invaluable as a source of spiritual comfort, consolation, and strength to all those who have already fully dedicated their lives to the teachings of Christ.

Fanning Yater Tant, Minister
Tenth and Francis Streets
Church of Christ

K. C. Moser, Minister
Twelfth and Drexel
Church of Christ

C. C. Jones, Minister
Nineteenth and Byers
Church of Christ

John H. Banister
Byron Fullerton,
Associate Ministers
Culbertson Heights
Church of Christ

Hubert Roach, Minister
Church of Christ
2900 South Harvey

T. J. Ruble, Minister
Southwest Church of Christ

Glendon Walker, Minister
31st and Blackwelder
Church of Christ

George W. Hardin, Minister
Putnam City Church of Christ
41st and MacArthur Blvd.

C. R. Malone, Minister
Britton Church of Christ

PREFACE

Perhaps all of us who have been privileged to learn the way of salvation in Christ, as it is revealed in the Word of God, have often felt a desire to bring these precious truths more forcefully before a lost and dying world. We believe that comparatively few people have much knowledge of the fundamental teachings of the Bible as they come to us direct from the pages of Holy Writ, unaffected by the doctrines of men.

The world in general does not know the plea made by the Church of Christ that, by rejecting all human creeds and accepting the Bible alone as authority in religion, the primitive faith and church of our Lord may be restored again to earth; that in keeping with this divine standard the New Testament church has been restored and, upon this basis, we plead for the unity of all who profess to believe in Christ. However, it seems impossible to reach the great masses of people who will not come into our churches to hear the gospel, and yet we feel the bounden duty to preach "from the housetops" the blessed story of redemption which unto us has been committed.

Realizing the effectiveness of the newspaper press as a means of presenting any matter to a multitude of people, the Culbertson Heights congregation of Oklahoma City in June, 1943, decided upon the plan of publishing in our two daily papers once each week a brief, courteous, but pointed article, or sermon. These were intended to set forth the fundamental scriptural lessons deemed most needed, and special attention was to be given to subjects designed to help those who have been confused by errors of denominational teachings. Other churches in the city joined in this novel plan of presenting the truth, and the writer was chosen to prepare the lessons which are published under the direction and control of the Culbertson Heights congregation.

The writer is deeply grateful to the preachers of Oklahoma City who have rendered invaluable assistance in this undertaking. We have received many letters and words of commendation from various sections of the country. A number of congregations of several different states have been publishing the articles in their daily papers or in the local weekly papers, as the brethren are free to use them in any way they may desire.

For whatever good these lessons have done, or may do anywhere, we give our heavenly Father all the thanks.—Frank Winters.

The Greatest of These

"And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." I Cor. 13:13.

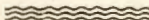
This text, the closing verse of that matchless psalm of love, which many regard as the finest chapter in the Bible, declares the permanent abiding of three great Christian graces, making love by far the greatest of them all.

Love is really the image of God in the soul. John says definitely that "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God." It is the one virtue possessed in common by the Father and His children. Every writer on the subject of love feels his inability to define, or correctly describe it. Even inspiration only points it out by examples; and likenesses; and benedictions.

The apostle, in the preceding chapter, had instructed these brethren concerning the uses of certain miraculous gifts prevalent in the early church and explained in detail how they might all work together in unity. Suddenly, he declares he will show them "a more excellent way" to do all things; and he sweeps us into this chapter where we behold love as the magic quality which will solve all the difficulties and differences of the Christian life.

It seems strange that this divine virtue is so much neglected, and other things substituted where love is needed most. Many seem to think the outward organization and activity of the church the most important thing in converting the world; but Paul does not say "faith, hope, organization," or "faith, hope, zeal," important as all these things are. Faith, hope and LOVE abide; but love is the divine element that gives polish and life to all the other graces, and without it every other virtue is barren and unfruitful.

Love is the greatest also as it is the end of redemption, for the love of a regenerated heart is a part and particle of God Himself; and as we grow in grace, love shall also grow and abound until at last it is merged forever into the boundless, eternal love of heaven.



Author's Note: These articles were published over the names and addresses of the congregations sponsoring same. The separate scriptural quotations appearing on some of the pages are not a part of the article but are inserted for balancing the page.

The Authority of the Bible

We think it must be evident to any student of spiritual conditions today that there is a widespread tendency to ignore and set aside the authority of the Bible.

One of the unique characteristics of this Book is that it claims the right to control the actions of men. It speaks "as one having authority."

It speaks to men, not from the standpoint of human wisdom or morality, but from a plane far above the most exalted human standards and with an attitude demanding unqualified submission. This assumption of authority over men rather contradicts the "democratic" spirit of our time that brooks no authority higher than "the people," which is to say man himself.

The great mass of men, including most of the leaders of our age, are completely absorbed in the activities of the world and are utterly indifferent to the claims of the Bible. But this Bible nevertheless still has a hold on the conscience of the few, and by its influence wields a mighty power. In some quarters the Bible is assailed and its divine origin disputed in the name of "scholarship" and of "science," though there is no known principle of science which the Bible contradicts. Sometimes the attack may come from those who concede the inspiration of the Bible but claim that other writers were also equally inspired. There is no practical difference in these two positions; the result is the same. The unique authority of the Bible is set aside.

We believe that it is of the very highest importance to insist unceasingly upon the sufficiency, finality and completeness of this revealed word of God, and with this attitude the Bible is a chart and compass, "a lamp unto our feet," and an anchor of the soul. With any other attitude the Book is bereft of its power to bless and save mankind, leaving humanity lost and groping in darkness and despair.



"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." John 12:48.

The Comfort of the Scriptures

"Thou shalt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee." Isa. 26:3. "That we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." Romans 15:4.

We believe if the unconverted could know the comfort and peace the holy Scriptures can bring to the Christian the churches could not house the multitudes seeking admission. Yet no beatitude of Christianity is more surely taught than that the living word of God received and kept in the hearts of men shall bless the heart and mind with the "peace of God which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). Not only do the Scriptures say that it shall be, but the experience of every true Christian confirms this truth that the word of God is a source of comfort and happiness far above any earthly pleasure and comparable only to the promised bliss of heaven of which it is undoubtedly a foretaste.

In our meditation we think what comforts the Bible has brought: under the arms of the Pilgrim fathers when they came to this country—in the hands of our minister when death came to our loved ones—in the best libraries of earth—in the humble Christian homes of the poor and lowly—in the tent of the dear boy far away in our country's service—in the hands of his mother as she waits and prays.

One of the scars of this age is the continued failure to find peace. In dismay we must realize that this generation, which has agitated most for peace, has produced the most wars. The words of our text, written by Isaiah in troublous times, gives the divine solution. It is an individual matter.

These lines are written hoping to help someone toward Christ and His peace, and may not we who have named the name of Christ and who by reason of haste and the cares of life have not always found the comfort the Bible may bring, may we not fail to seek and claim this precious treasure which, through the death of Christ, our elder brother, has been provided for all of us as children of God.



"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful: But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night." Psalms 1:1-2.

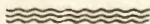
The Living Word

No statement of the Bible is more significant or more important to dying humanity than that the Word of God is a Living Word. Among many scriptures revealing this great truth is that of Philippians 2:16 where the apostle calls it "the word of life." Jesus himself in John's Gospel declared his words to be "spirit" and "life," and Hebrews 4:12 declares the Word of God is "living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword."

In this old world of death and decay, of which Satan has made one gigantic cemetery, it is heartening to know that there is one living thing that shall never die—God's holy word. The history of nearly two thousand years has proved it indestructible, for it has withstood the attacks of its enemies and today stands higher in the minds of all right thinking people than it has ever stood, and this includes the wisest scientists of our day.

In the New Testament, we approach the higher and deeper truth that it is not only a living word, but a life-giving word. This is strikingly revealed in the accounts of conversion in the beautiful figure of the new birth. In I Peter 1:23, he describes the Christian as "being born again not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which lives and abides forever." James teaches "by His own will begat He us with the word of truth," and in the parable of the sower our Lord in His matchless way reveals that the seed of His Kingdom is the Word of God planted in the hearts of men. As its Author and Giver is eternal and spiritual, His Word, pregnant with his Holy Spirit, begets the child of God unto a life that is spiritual and eternal. When the new birth of water and the spirit is complete, the word becomes a life-sustaining word to the babe in Christ as "desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby," and, as God's word abides in his heart, he is a new creature, destined to a life eternal.

God grant that we may not faint nor fear, but may hide this living word in our hearts—this living word, in a dying world.



"For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart," Hebrews 4:12.

The Restoration

"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."
I Peter 4:11.

Today we wish to present a very brief historical account of things it is necessary to know in order to understand religious conditions of our times and particularly the plea made by the members of the Church of Christ, and by them alone. Every student is more or less familiar with the great Protestant movement known as the Reformation, which began with Martin Luther in the sixteenth century and was continued in later times by John Calvin, John Wesley and many of their able contemporaries. They were great and good men and did a great work in a world gone far astray from the old paths of Christianity, and unto them we confess a debt of gratitude which we shall never be able to repay.

Notwithstanding the good intentions of those men, however, a great evil arose in the wake of Protestantism and the new religious liberty, which, although deplored by all sincere believers, has been the greatest hindrance to the Christian religion. It was the multitude of sects and denominations which sprang into existence, all governed by different creeds written by men. In spite of sincere efforts at reformation, the differences between these denominational bodies became more pronounced and more impossible to reconcile. The latter part of the eighteenth century presented a dark picture, not alone of a divided Christendom, but of a wave of atheism and infidelity which threatened the very foundation of the Christian faith. Thomas Paine had recently published his book, "The Age of Reason," and its philosophy was widely acclaimed in Europe and America.

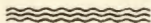
These conditions caused many thoughtful leaders of different denominations, of widely scattered sections of Europe and America, to advocate the putting forth of every effort to bring a halt to the divided state of Christendom by eliminating human creeds as the underlying cause. The Haldane brothers of Scotland, James O'Kelly of North Carolina, and Barton W. Stone of Kentucky were pioneers in a great movement that was soon to burst into flame.

A little more than one hundred years ago in the eastern section of our country occurred a revolutionary event in religious history which, in its practical importance to Christianity, we believe is perhaps the greatest occurrence since the days of the apostles. We refer to the undertaking and accomplishment by a group of devoted people to restore to earth the pure religion and worship of the church of our Lord as it was originally established by Christ and the

apostles. This was accomplished by the rejection of all creeds and doctrines of men and by taking Christ as their creed and the Holy Bible alone as their rule of faith and practice. Alexander Campbell and his father, Thomas Campbell, were the most active leaders, although they were assisted by at least a dozen other outstanding preachers, as they began the difficult task of restoring the primitive faith. The question is asked, "Did Campbell, then, establish the Church of Christ?" The answer is emphatically "No!" He denounced churches founded by men as unscriptural. Neither did these men seek to reform any church, for this had also proved to be a mistake.

Campbell and his co-laborers had as their object to dig deep beneath denominationalism and to restore that which had once existed on earth and which for hundreds of years had been buried under the rubbish of ecclesiasticism. No man was ever taught to believe anything because Alexander Campbell taught it. This restoration movement met with a great popular accord, for thousands and then hundreds of thousands of people heard the word of the Lord and God's plan of salvation preached directly from the Bible. They became members of the church called only after the New Testament name and they called themselves nothing but Christians. They considered themselves not a denomination, but, having restored the original church and its spiritual order, they invited all believers to unite on the only possible basis of unity, on the Word of God and upon that alone. There were two principles upon which they reasoned this could be accomplished. They had the same seed on earth as Peter and John had on Pentecost, which Jesus said was the Word of God, and the same soil which Christ also said was the hearts of men. If they planted this seed in the soil, it would produce, just as it did then, nothing but Christians.

Their inviolate rule was to preach nothing but God's Word. "Where the Bible speaks, we shall speak, and where the Bible is silent, we shall be silent." Today in a troubled and divided world, and with nothing but love and respect in our hearts for all sincere believers in God and His Christ, we earnestly plead and confidently believe that believers might all be one if in reality and in truth His Word, and that alone, should be received into every heart.



"Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein." Jeremiah 6:16.

“Rightly Dividing the Word”

“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”
II Timothy 2:15.

If the Bible is the very word of God as all Christians believe, it is of the utmost importance that every child of God should have at least a general and correct knowledge of this, the greatest library in the world. Today we are passing through a world revolution in many ways and are soon to come face to face with other religions that know not our God and our Christ as we know them. Then, too, there is an increasing number of religious sects that differ so widely from the Church which Christ established that if Christianity is to survive we must get back to the blessed old Book and walk in its ways, that our faith shall not rest on any word of man, but upon “Him in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”

“Rightly dividing (or handling aright) the word of truth” is our text. All competent teachers of the Bible recognize that the first great essential is a correct knowledge of its different parts or divisions. It is all the word of God, but the fact that the 66 books of which it is composed were written over a period of several hundred years, and addressed to different peoples in widely different conditions, has everything to do with understanding its meaning and its applicability in this day. Hoping we might be of help to some beginners in this study, we are setting down an elementary sketch of the natural divisions of God’s Book.

First, are the two general divisions of the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament naturally divides itself into four parts: (1) Law—first five books of the Bible; (2) History—the next twelve books; (3) Devotional—the next five books, and (4) the 17 books of prophecy. The four natural divisions of the New Testament are: (1) Biography—the first four books; (2) History of the early church—Acts of the Apostles; (3) Epistles—next 21 books, and (4) Revelation—the last book of the Bible.

Gentle reader, of this you may rest assured: there is no equal for this unadorned volume which graces the libraries and firesides of more homes today than ever before. As we contemplate the tremendous importance of eternal salvation to a lost world, we humbly submit this simple lesson, hoping for a greater interest in this “Book of Books” in this dark and troubled hour.

The Three Dispensations

There are three great dispensations, or systems of worship recorded in the Bible, which are usually called the patriarchial, Jewish and Christian dispensations.

The patriarchial age or dispensation began at creation and lasted about 2,500 years to the giving of the Law of Moses. It was a family-worship institution in which the father or patriarch of the family was the prophet, priest and king. Not much is recorded of this wonderful age, but Moses, writing by inspiration long after the age of patriarchs, gives account of it in Genesis and up to the twentieth chapter of Exodus. There are other references to events of this age in various parts of the Bible. Among its wonderful characters are Enoch, Noah and Abraham, and it embraced the service at the altar, oral instruction, prayer, thanksgiving and benediction.

The Jewish dispensation began by the giving of the Law of Moses when he gathered the Israelites together at Mount Sinai soon after their deliverance from Egyptian bondage and this age lasted until the death of Christ, a period of about 1,500 years. The Law of Moses was given only to the Jews, who in that day were the chosen people of God, through which lineage Christ was to be born. All the wonderful books of the law, prophecies, and history of the Old Testament (except the small portion covering the patriarchial age) belong to this Jewish dispensation.

The Christian dispensation properly begins with the birthday of the Church of Christ on Pentecost as recorded in the second chapter of Acts, and it is to last until Christ comes again at the end of the world. Unlike the Law of Moses, it is an International religion. Christ is the cornerstone of Christianity. His religion is not an outgrowth of the Law of Moses, or Judaism, but is shown to be the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham 400 years before the Law of Moses was given. Embraced in its fundamental principles are: The grace of God in sending His son to become the incarnate Word of God among men; Christ's death for the sins of the world; His resurrection to prove eternal life; the gift of the Holy Spirit to infallibly guide the writers of the New Testament, which reveals Christ as the Savior of the world through faith in Him and obedience to His blessed will; Heaven, the eternal abode of all God's faithful children; and eternal punishment of the wicked.

Story the Four Gospels Tell

Matthew—Mark—Luke—John! They are the world's most familiar quartet. It was their province to write the biography and history of Jesus Christ. Their writings stand alone. Nothing in history compares with the testimony of this immortal four.

They wrote at a time when the age of law, or prophecy, and national power of the Jewish people had long since passed away, and in its stead had come an age of sectarianism, tradition, bigotry, hypocrisy and self-righteousness. While the Jews boasted of Abraham as their father, of Moses as their lawgiver, they had almost entirely forsaken the fundamental principles of their religion. In this age Jesus appeared. Born as a Jew and surrounded by this selfishness and hypocrisy, He taught a philanthropy, mercy and love unknown; and, as these four inspired writers penned the story of His birth, life, mission, miracles, death, resurrection and ascension, they unwittingly wrote of the Being which was to cause the greatest change in human society of all time.

Among the many remarkable features of this gospel story is that they give a complete account of the things Jesus did and suffered, without a single comment of their own: no note of criticism, no word of praise, nothing to bias the human mind or judgment of others. At times, of course, their love and devotion to their Master appears, but of His character and goodness, from them no eulogism, no praise. John alone ventures to say why his gospel was written: "These are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name." This was the great purpose of all the gospels; to create in the minds and hearts of men that faith, the end of which is life eternal.

These four gave no history of the church except in preparation only. In the last verses the conditions of admission into the church are given and the apostles were restrained from preaching this until they should be "endued with power from on high." Thus stand these four gospels, like four cornerstones of our faith. They declare His divinity and affirm His approbation by God, by angels and by men. Even the devils tremble in the agony of their belief. Every kind of evidence known in the courts of men is made a part of their record. In wonder and admiration, we thank God for the case so ably presented by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The Bible's Most Neglected Book

Acts of Apostles is as important as any book in the whole Bible, but it is, perhaps, the most neglected one. Chrysostom, writing in the fifth century, complains that most teachers knew little of this great historical and doctrinal book written by Luke about A. D. 63. Strange as the statement may seem, in our day it is still neglected and comparatively unknown to multitudes who seek elsewhere in the Bible for instruction that is plainly taught in Acts, most of which is nowhere else obtainable.

The reason is that even in Chrysostom's day, the church had departed from its primitive faith, and this book, containing the very heart of gospel teaching on the first principles of Christ's religion and the workings of His church, was a living obstacle to the doctrines invented by men which had supplanted the true religion. It is likewise true today and for the same reason. It is impossible to induce many good people really to study this book and to adopt its specific teachings. We sincerely believe that practically all believers in Christ might be united by accepting unreservedly Acts of the Apostles.

Briefly, the book contains an account of the origin of early experiences of the church at Jerusalem; of the founding, then, of other congregations in surrounding cities, including the conversion of the Gentiles; of Paul's preaching tours throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia and Greece, including an attempt by Judaizing teachers to make the Gentiles subject to the Law of Moses; and finally of Paul's imprisonments beginning at Jerusalem and terminating at Rome.

The purposes of the inspired writer are seen in the many wonderful and varied events related. Much the greater part of the book consists in detailed accounts of conversions to Christ, and of unsuccessful attempts at the same. Perhaps the wisdom of inspiration, foreseeing the time when differences and divisions would arise concerning methods of conversion, has endeavored to throw around us this mantle of protection. Undoubtedly the writer's chief design was to set forth a multitude of cases of conversion, the factors of which are substantially alike, so that the teacher who proposes to guide men into the way of salvation is in duty bound to guide them by these models, and the man who supposes himself to be a genuine convert to Christ may test his experience by these examples.

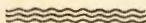
The New Testament Scriptures

The advent of Jesus Christ on earth as the Savior brought into the world a new system of religion, known as the new covenant or new testament. It was very different from the Law of Moses given exclusively to the Jews, which law was taken away by the death of Jesus on the cross (Col. 2:14). The New Testament scriptures are an unfolding of the gospel system or plan of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as the son of God. The New Testament alone reveals the way of this great salvation. We now present a brief outline of these scriptures with their special significance:

The four gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—give the history of Jesus as an example, of His teaching as instruction, and His death as the atonement for the sins of the world; all this for the purpose of creating faith in Him as the son of God. Acts of the Apostles gives the history of the organization of the church; the coming of the Holy Spirit and its purposes; the preaching of the apostles under the great commission of Christ, beginning at Jerusalem and continuing throughout the world. In Acts alone, of all books of the Bible, we are told how people came into the church; of what they must do to be saved and the many examples of conversion to Christ.

The twenty-one epistles were written to organized churches and individuals—to Christians, instructing them in everything pertaining to life and godliness, that these children of God, by receiving "the sincere milk of the word," might grow strong in all the Christian graces, thus preventing their falling away. Fourteen of the epistles were written by the Apostle Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, and in his writings, as in no other, is developed the distinction between the gospel of Christ and the Law of Moses which Judaizing teachers sometimes sought to bind upon Christians.

The Revelation by the old Apostle John gives a prophetic history of the church, foretelling great calamities which were to come upon the earth, the struggles and sufferings of the saints and their final victory. It concludes with a word picture of John's vision of heaven that beggars the language of the ablest writers of all human literature.



"Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine." II Timothy 4:2.

The Old Testament—From the Christian Standpoint

The Old Testament scriptures reveal primarily the religion of the patriarchal and Jewish dispensations, yet, properly understood, they are of immense value to the Christian. The arrangement of these 39 books in their order is: First, the five books of law, then twelve books of history, five books of poetry and seventeen books of prophecy.

Briefly, the main designs of the patriarchal and Jewish dispensations and the uses of the Old Testament scriptures are: (1) They contain a historical development of the purpose of God to redeem a sinful race. They present a record of the moral government of the world—the events of time being strung on a single thread running through the ages. That thread was the purpose of God to prepare the race for the coming of the Redeemer. The rise and fall of nations and of individuals; the captivities of the tribes of Israel and Judah and their establishment in the land of Judea were overruled for this purpose. (2) They contain hundreds of prophecies and many types and figures of the coming salvation; and are, therefore, a vast array of evidence for the divinity of the New Testament, for none of these could be comprehended until they were fulfilled in Christ. (3) As moral principles are unchangeable, they contain many precious lessons of righteousness and truth that are equally applicable to all dispensations. Its developments of human nature and character are of priceless value, as it records impartially the lives of men—the virtues of the bad and the faults of the good, unlike all human biographies. We must study the Old Testament, therefore, from the Christian point of view, and understand that “the things written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). (4) They reveal the will of God as addressed to patriarchs and Jews, but as a book of authority to instruct us in the way of salvation it is not. The gospel is not found in it except in prophecy and in promise.

Significant is the last injunction of the Old Testament—Malachi 4:4, “Remember ye the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.” It was the law of Moses for all Israel—not the gospel of Christ for all nations. No student can understand God’s word until he has learned to “rightly divide the word of truth” (II Tim. 2:15).

The Life-Giving Word

"Having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God which liveth and abideth." I Peter 1:23.

The best evidence of the divine inspiration of the Bible is the very word itself, and the above text of the life-giving word is an outstanding example. As in natural propagation, life only can produce life, so spiritual life must be and is produced, by the seed of the kingdom, which Jesus said was the word of God and in which he has placed the germ of immortality.

What a thrilling experience it must have been for the apostles in Jerusalem as they preached the first gospel sermons; to see thousands converted to the new religion, with new hearts, new spirits and new lives, unlike anything ever witnessed before! With a fellowship and love that caused them to sell their property so that none should lack, the "whole multitude of them that believed were of one heart" and "great grace was upon them all." All this by the simple process of Christ's gospel being preached and by them believed and obeyed.

Perhaps it is not so simple after all, for, as scientists have never been able to see the germ of life in a kernel of grain, so no man is wise enough to discern how God puts into His word His spirit and life, true as we know this to be. Romans 1:16 declares the gospel of Christ is the "power of God unto salvation." No wonder of earth is more profound than that of a wicked man converted to Christianity by the word of God which by faith he has received into his heart. Once worldly and evil, he is now holy in life, charitable in heart, his life a benediction in his community, and "having favor with all the people."

This Word by which Christians are begotten is an "incorruptible seed." Is it not strange, with all the error and change since the Bible was given, that it is still as pure and uncorrupted as it came from the lips and pen of inspiration? All else has perished and decayed, but the perils of opposition, of wars, the Dark Ages, and wisdom of the world have left it unimpaired. Wherever it has touched a country, that country has pulled away from the other nations in progress; wherever it has touched a community, the whole population sees its uplift and advancement; and wherever it has been truly received into a human heart, it has made a little of heaven, and if it abide, that soul shall be preserved alive forever.

"It Is Written"

Many centuries ago our Lord began the system of a written record as a means of preserving His revelation to man and of keeping it pure and unchanged. God was not unmindful that His creature called man was, at best, but "a reed shaken in the wind" in the hands of Satan, the great deceiver.

Early in sacred history we find the revealed Word finding lodgment on parchment, papyrus and tablets of stone, so unerringly recorded by inspired men that it was said to be "written by the finger of God." As Christ's gospel was preached, men of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, began to write it down. By the close of the first century, the writing of the Scriptures had been completed, and the closing verses of John's Revelation, like a holy seal, enjoins all men forever against any addition, or taking therefrom. In due course of time the inspired writings were compiled into the Bible, universally recognized as the foundation of the Christian faith. A divine hand has undoubtedly preserved it undefiled unto this day, though its effectiveness has been hindered by many adversities, one of which we now wish to consider.

We hear much today of religious intolerance, but we believe the greatest evil is not intolerance but is the widespread indifference of those professing Christianity to what is really written in the Book of God. This has caused the many divisions and denominations of Christendom. Righteous as religious tolerance is between individuals, it is not the attitude of God and His Bible toward man. The Bible assumes absolute authority in its demands and requires unity among believers.

Gentle reader, the Bible was not written for preachers and scholars alone. The Master laid down the rule which all other Scriptures confirm that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God." The responsibility of knowing the will of God is placed upon each individual.

The world is in the midst of a great revolutionary era, out of which we hope will come better things. Today our thought and our prayer is that all of us who profess to believe in Christ may turn to a sincere study of His Word and that alone, with the hope that differences may be eliminated and that believers may be one again as they were in that beautiful beginning.

My Bible

By Henry Van Dyke

"Born in the East, and clothed in oriental form and imagery, the Bible walks the ways of the world with familiar feet, and enters land after land to find its own everywhere. It has learned to speak in hundreds of languages to the heart of a man. It comes into the palace to tell the monarch that he is a servant of the Most High, and into the cottage to tell the peasant that he is a child of God. Children listen to its stories with wonder and delight, and wise men ponder them as parables of life.

"It has a word of peace for the time of peril, a word of consolation for the day of calamity, a word of comfort for the hour of darkness. Its oracles are repeated in the assembly of the people, and its counsels are whispered into the ears of the lonely. The wise and the proud tremble at its warnings. But to the wounded and penitent it has a mother's voice.

"The wilderness and the solitary place have been made glad by it, and fires of the hearth have lighted the reading of its well-worn pages. It has woven itself into our deepest affections and colored our dearest dreams, so that love and friendship, sympathy and devotion, memory and hope, put on the beautiful garments of its treasured speech, breathing of frankincense and myrrh.

"Above the cradle and beside the grave its great words come to us uncalled. They fill our prayers with power larger than we know, and the beauty of them lingers in our ear long after the sermons they have adorned have been forgotten. They return to us swiftly and quietly, like birds flying from far away, like springs of water breaking forth from the mountain beside a long-forgotten path. They grow richer as pearls do when worn near the heart. No man is poor or desolate who has this treasure for his own. When the landscape darkens and when the trembling pilgrim comes to the valley named the shadow, he is not afraid to enter. He takes the rod and staff of Scripture in his hand; he says to friend and comrade, 'Goodbye, we shall meet again,' and comforted by that support he goes toward the lonely pass as one who climbs through the darkness into light."



"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 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 11:28-30.

The Divine Standard

One of the commonest expressions we hear from the lips of religious people is that "it doesn't make any difference what church a man belongs to, just so his heart is right with God." Like many popular sayings, this is only half true. And in the sense in which it is ordinarily used it is certainly not true at all.

If a man's "heart is right with God," he will belong to the Lord's church. For no man can have a heart that is right in the sight of God while he is either refusing or failing to render obedience to the commandments of Christ. Christ himself said, "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). We do not concede it to be possible, therefore, for any man to love the Lord—to have his "heart right with God"—and neglect to do those things commanded by the Lord. And the things commanded by the Lord will always make a man a member of the church of the New Testament.

That a man can be honest and sincere, and at the same time honestly mistaken, is too obvious to need much proof. We see it illustrated a thousand ways in daily life. It is also profoundly true in religion. See, for instance, the case of Saul of Tarsus. This man lived "in all good conscience"; yet at the same time he persecuted the church of God. In the popular usage of phrases his heart was certainly "right with God" even while he was giving himself to the murder of innocent Christians; for was he not honest? Was he not sincere? Was he not indeed zealous in the religion of his fathers?

Honesty and sincerity and zeal are not enough—it also takes truth. These fine qualities of heart and soul must be controlled and directed by the truth. The Bible—not our sincerity and zeal and honesty—is the standard by which judgment shall be rendered at the last day. The Bible, of course, includes these qualities; but it also embraces something greater than all of them, that is "the truth." Christ said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

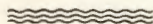
In order to make certain that your "heart is right with God," be very sure that you have "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." (Romans 6:17). Then there can be no mistake; for God Himself declares that such a one is "right" with Him.

The Word of Life

No scientist of earth is able to define, much less to explain, the thing we call life. The best definitions stand as much in need of explanation as that which they purport to explain. What a marvelous thing is life, transcending far beyond the comprehension of man, who has learned very many facts concerning life, but can give us no intelligible explanation of them! But if none of us can say what life is, we can all distinguish between that which is living and those objects which have no life. Between the two there is a great gulf which only divine power can span; only the living God can impart life to that which is lifeless. The written Word of God contains the characteristics found only in living things, as it exhibits not merely the perishable life that we are familiar with, but life of a different order imperishable and incorruptible.

The Bible differs from other books in its perpetual freshness. This characteristic will be recognized by those who know the Book in that intimate way which comes from living with it as with a member of one's family. The Bible never becomes exhausted, never diminishes its power to quicken the soul who comes to it—like a fountain of living water, always fresh and always refreshing. The most familiar passages yield as much (if not more) refreshment at the thousandth reading as at the first. Like the living companion to whom we go for help and fellowship, this living Book adapts itself to every new phase of our experience and new conditions of life. From the most familiar passages, there comes again and again a new message, just as our most familiar friend or companion has something new to say as new situations require it. This is true of no book of man from which we obtain the writer's message the first perusal. However beautiful its language may be, the second reading is seldom enjoyed.

The difference is between the living and the dead, for the Bible is a living word. Like the mechanical processes which generate electricity, this Word of Life, if received and kept in the human heart, generates the spark and spirit of immortality which shall one day bring that soul still alive into eternal glory.



"That ye may 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; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain." Philippians 2:15-16.

God's Word as a Discerner of Hearts

In the startling words of Hebrews 4:12, the apostle declares the power of God's word and concluding says it "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Nothing in all this world is more wonderful than the living, literal word of Christ! It is probably underestimated even by those among us who believe it and preach it every day.

In this unusual faculty of a "discerner," or "searcher" or critic of hearts, we behold the Word as an intelligent being with power to see into the secret recesses of our hearts and lives. We go to other books to learn of other men, but we go to the Bible to learn about ourselves. This book seems to know all about us, lays bare the deepest secrets of our hearts and shows us thoughts and intents we probably never knew existed. It reveals man to himself in a way it is difficult to describe, yet it is a faithful mirror reflecting us as we really are; then it counsels us, reproves, exhorts, guides and enlightens.

The multitudes turning to the Word in these troublous times is evidence of its comfort and power. Instead of being critics of the Bible, as many of them were, the time seems to be at hand when the critics shall be brought low, the Lord shall be exalted and the Word of God shall judge the critics. Meanwhile the living Word shall continue to be the discerning companion of all who resort to it for help and comfort.

The Bible never seems like an old book, an oriental book written in a language now dead. It seems new and fresh and in one writer's words "as much alive as if it had hands and feet." As the children of Adam's race are born into the world, this Word of Christ seems waiting for them, as a heavenly guide to lead them into, and then along the highway of our King, Jesus Christ the Lord. The "word of His grace" adapts itself thus to each succeeding generation, revealing man to himself and God unto man and is abundantly able to build us up and give us "an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." (Acts 20:32.)



"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." Deut. 4:2.

The Unanswered Prayer of the Lord

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word: That they all may be one; as thou Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us; That the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me." John 17:20-21.

Of all prayers recorded in the Bible the most wonderful is that uttered by our Savior, in the Upper Room, just before he led his disciples out into the moonlit night, on the way to Gethsemane.

He prayed for three things that night; for himself and his glorification with the Heavenly Glory he had before his incarnation; for the faithfulness and providential care of his apostles; then he prayed for all those who should believe in Him through future ages. His one petition on their behalf was that they might all be one, that the world might believe he was the Messiah. This last has been called the unanswered prayer of the Lord as divisions and denominations among believers is beheld everywhere. We know the early church was "of one heart and of one soul" (Acts 4:32), and that with a united front the gospel was preached throughout the known world in the first century.

Within a few generations, however, as warned by Christ and the apostles, leaders began teaching new theories and doctrines of men instead of the inspired word of God. Error and divisions corrupted the pure religion and this culminated in the complete apostasy of the Church in about the fifth century which lasted more than a thousand years.

Surely every sincere believer in Christ must deplore the divisions of Christendom. It is a gross violation of the Master's prayer; the one barrier against the successful evangelization of the world. Would to God we could all come together with no creed or doctrine but God's holy Bible, in which we all claim to believe, and restore the primitive Church in faith, doctrine and practice, just as it was in the beginning; so that unity might prevail and that his prayer and his death be not in vain.



"Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment." I Corinthians 1:10.

Christian Fellowship

"Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need." Acts 4:34-35.

The Jerusalem church was the first congregation of Christians ever established. These first chapters of Acts are an inspiration to us as they portray, among other things, the unparalleled acts of fellowship and benevolence abounding in the new society.

This congregation was composed of thousands of members, and, considering the variety of social relations from which they had been suddenly drawn together, it is amazing that they were "of one heart and soul." The unity for which Jesus prayed was now a reality in the church and witnessed by an admiring world.

Surprising, too, are the manifestations of complete unselfishness which led each to say that the things he possessed were not his own but the property of all. This was a "new thing under the sun" for Jerusalem had many poor people and this brotherly kindness to them exceeded even family generosity. This condition was not the result of socialistic theorizing; or of any rule or requirement of the church; or commandment of any apostle. It was the voluntary expression of the love of God and man which had taken possession of their hearts when, by the new birth of water and the spirit, they were made children of God.

The practice of selling their property to relieve the needy is not recorded of any other church, yet being under the personal supervision of the apostles, it cannot be considered a mistake. In reality, this church was setting an example for all churches, for all time, that the needy brethren must be provided for, even if it takes our lands and houses.

The restoration of primitive Christianity includes this feature of Christ's religion. We pay a word of tribute to the fine examples of Christian fellowship we have known in the Church of Christ in our day, as brethren have humbly tried to follow the New Testament examples in caring for those in need.

But fellowship includes much more than physical relief. The encouragement of each other in the things of the Lord, as we strive to keep alive the flame of brotherly love; or when sickness and death have been our portion and brethren, like ministering angels, have carried us across the chasm; or when, in trial and adversity, a brother's hand is laid upon our shoulder; these, too, are to Christians a foretaste of God's eternal Heaven.

Christian Unity

"That they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." John 17:21.

We come now, not with any "holier than thou" attitude but with earnest and humble hearts, to study this subject which is near to the hearts of us all. These words of our Lord's prayer, uttered almost at the foot of the cross, reveal that the deepest desire of His heart for His disciples was that they might all be one. The clear implication is that the conversion of the world would depend upon this unity.

Almost everyone will agree that the divisions and denominations of Christendom are a gross violation of the thought and spirit of this prayer. We most surely believe that creeds and doctrines of men are the causes of these divisions and that unity among believers in Christ may be accomplished by rejecting these causes of divisions and accepting the Bible alone as our rule of faith and practice in religion. Some may argue it is impossible to have such a unity, but they have not stopped to think that Jesus and His apostles taught unity, and prayed for it, and commanded it as an absolute essential.

But let us suppose the Apostle Paul were to return to earth and preach in our fair city; and all of us believers in Christ should go to hear him. We might all gladly carry with us the Holy Bible in which Paul has fourteen epistles, but we should not expect to see in the hands of any of us a creed or opinion of man decreeing what the will of God shall be. We would all wish to hear the inspired man of God preach and, when he had finished, we would not be divided into parties, but would all be rejoicing together in the gracious religion of Christ. We cannot hear the apostles speak personally, but Providence has given us their words and the complete will of God written down that we may believe it and obey it without error.

Let no man who expects to see the Father's face in peace ever say the Bible cannot be understood. True, there are some deep sayings that no man may ever be able to fathom, but every revelation of His divine will to man is so simply revealed that the 12-year-old boy or girl may learn it perfectly. One great essential is learning the proper divisions of the Bible, for it is very systematically arranged. These divisions are clearly set forth by the Bible itself, but beginners need to know to whom and under what circumstances the particular language was addressed.

The unity for which Jesus prayed is not a union or federation

of different denominations. There is no creed upon which all denominations could unite, but upon the Bible alone this is not only possible but is very easily accomplished, if, in reality, all parties want the truth of God and nothing more. Furthermore, it has been the thought and ideal of so many great leaders who did not attempt to put it into practice. John Wesley said, "Would to God that all party names and unscriptural phrases and forms which have so long divided the Christian world were forgotten, and that we might all agree to sit down together as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear his word, to imbibe his spirit and to transcribe His life into our own."

Let us then walk by the Word of God which will guide us all into the same path and unify all men on earth who love the Lord. To this cause our efforts are unceasingly committed.

The Perfect Life

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Matt. 6:33.

Our text is one of those rare gems of the Master's sayings which comes close to the heart of everyone of us; thrills us with its rich providence; then sends us to our knees to ask for grace and mercy because we have kept it so poorly. It is a golden rule of action in the great drama of life, the very essence of Christian living and the key to the happiest and most successful life on earth.

Every man who would make a success of life must have something that is always first with him. If we really have faith in Christ, we know his blessed kingdom, which is his church, is entitled to the first and best of everything we have and are—our affections, our possessions and our service. Without the righteousness his kingdom affords, none of us shall be able to see the Lord. As we contemplate its beauty and exalted standard, regardless of our imperfections, we love to think and dwell upon it as the great divine ideal, and from it take renewed devotion.

It seems the providence part of the saying is more a gracious added gift than a reward. Some scholars say the thought is from the old custom of merchants to "throw in" some article with a large bill of goods purchased. As we have sought and found the great redemption which Christ has purchased for us with his own precious blood, so the Father has added unto us the food and shelter and the wherewithal we shall be clothed. God's temporal blessings have surely followed the righteous in every age, as said David of old, "I have never seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread."

The Birthday of the Church

No event in religious history is more interesting or more important to the Christian than those of the great day upon which the Church of Christ was inaugurated in the city of Jerusalem, the account of which is recorded in the second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It occurred upon an important feast day of the Jews (the day of Pentecost), when multitudes of Jewish people had assembled from every nation for this religious service.

Fifty days before this the Lord had risen from the dead and ten days prior to Pentecost, He had ascended into heaven, having bidden His sorrowing disciples to tarry at Jerusalem until He should send them the Holy Spirit, which was to be a comforter to them and was to be their infallible guide in preaching this new religion. It was also to give them power to perform marvelous miracles to confirm the word of Christ which they were to preach.

Now, on the morning of the day of Pentecost, these twelve apostles were all together in an upper room. Suddenly a great miracle occurred, the like of which has never been known, before or since. It was the coming of the Holy Spirit, as Christ had promised. With a great sound from heaven as of the rushing of a mighty wind, the Spirit came upon them, tongues like as of fire sat upon each of them, and they were all filled with it, so that as they preached the men of every nation in Jerusalem that day understood them in their native tongue.

When the astonished multitude was assembled, the Apostle Peter stood and preached unto them the first gospel sermon; Christ was preached as the risen Lord and Savior for the first time; and for the first time a lost world was told what to do to be saved. Three thousand of those who heard this new gospel that day believed, repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins. The record states that the Lord added them to His church.

They were not only a saved people, but a completely changed people, holy, pure and charitable in heart, all rejoicing in the great salvation the grace of God had brought them, and they were all one.

Thus that day the church was born, and this child of heaven, destined to an inheritance so splendid, was radiant and strong in her cradle.

The Church as an Organization

New Testament scriptures reveal that the Church of Christ is a divine institution, organized by the apostles under the direction of the Holy Spirit, and is God's means of saving the world. Since its establishment on the day of Pentecost, no soul has ever been saved or shall ever be saved outside of this body which Christ purchased with his own blood.

Regarding its organization: first, as to its name, the Scriptures show that Christians were called in their collective capacity, "the church," "the church of the Lord," "the church of God," "churches of Christ"; but no human name was to it ever applied. In their individual capacity, while sometimes referred to as "disciples," "brethren," "saints," etc., the only name they ever wore was that of "Christians."

Each congregation was a separate unit answerable only to God in matters of doctrine and authority. Its only officers were elders (sometimes called bishops) and deacons appointed over each congregation. The elders, or bishops were to oversee the church and labor for its spiritual welfare—to settle its difficulties, strengthen the weak and lift up the fallen. The deacons were to superintend the temporal welfare of the congregation, caring for the needy and providing for the material necessities of the church. There were "evangelists" who served as preachers of the gospel, but they had no official capacity in the congregation. The word "minister," which really means "servant," is variously applied to evangelists, apostles, and any other servant in the church. The word "reverend," used only once in the Bible, is applied to God and never to a gospel preacher. The word "pastor" is used to refer to the elders who are the spiritual "feeders of the flock." Each congregation had a plurality of elders, but never in God's word is a record where one elder had authority over a plurality of churches.

In the study of the Bible as its great truths pass before our minds, we are impressed by what one has called "the majesty of simplicity." The foregoing is the simple arrangement of the organization of the church of the Lord. There are no higher officers than those we have named and, if we are to be scriptural in church organization, these and only these are the names, the offices, and the principles which we may use.

The One Body

"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all . . ." Ephesians 4:4-6.

These sublime words of the great apostle declare the manifold unity of the Christian system, and affirm that there is but one body, or Church, as truly as there is but one God. Unfortunately, today Christendom is divided into many bodies, composed of good and sincere people all worshipping the same God, believing in the same Redeemer and the same Bible, singing mostly the same songs—but divided into denominations of widely divergent doctrines and having no fellowship one with another.

In the light of the sacred scriptures, no sane man can believe that this condition is acceptable to the Lord or that these organizations with conflicting doctrines can all be right. We might all be wrong, but we cannot all be right. God has provided that man shall be a free moral agent, with power to choose eternal life or death. In the Garden of Eden and until this good hour, though He craves the worship and service of His immortal creature, yet it must be rendered voluntarily and according to the Father's will. There is another great truth running throughout the Christian religion especially—that there is laid upon every child of God the bounden duty to teach and uphold the true doctrine of Christ unerringly and uncorrupted and the further duty of correcting any error found among Christ's disciples.

In view of these things, and with nothing but love in our hearts, the Church of Christ makes this distinctive plea: That there is a way of unity; the way of truth, and that way is in the return to the Bible alone as our only rule of faith and practice in religion. Some may dismiss this plea as impossible of accomplishment, but we believe God will surely help us to be one if this we sincerely desire to be. It might not be accomplished in a day, but of this be assured that a nucleus has been formed, around which one day may congregate all believers in Christ and upon the very basis on which Christ's Church began. Surely no ambition could be more pleasing to our heavenly Father, the Author of unity, or should be more welcomed by all reasonable men than this effort to which we have put our hands, the unity upon a scriptural basis of all who love the Lord.

The Church of Christ's Distinctive Plea

We wish, today, to set forth in a simple way a brief outline of some great essential truths of Christianity, and upon each of which, the Church of Christ makes a distinctive plea. Our hope is to be helpful to those who are distressed, as we are, because of the divisions that exist among believers in Christ. In view of this and with no desire to be either vain or controversial, we really believe that if these fundamental principles could be accepted by all believers, it would go far toward bringing us together.

We believe, first, that the Bible is the sole and absolute authority in matters of religion. Second, in the matter of Christian conversion we believe that this divine process is clearly revealed in the New Testament; that it is the same in every case of conversion and is easily understood, being neither mysterious nor miraculous. Third, the study of the Bible depends, most of all, upon an understanding of its proper divisions; the purpose, applicability and use of each part, all of which is definitely revealed by the Bible itself.

We hope to bring a simple, scriptural study of one of these themes each week for a time, and, with nothing but love and respect in our hearts for every sincere believer in Christ, we trust these studies may help and bless the readers hereof and that they may be well pleasing in the sight of Him who so earnestly prayed: "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they may all be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou has sent me." John 17:20-21.



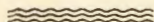
The Bible Alone as Authority in Religion

"All scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Timothy 3:16-17.

Our purpose today is not to prove that the Bible is the Word of God, but to appeal to that great body of good and sincere people who believe in Christ and in His Word, yet are divided into many different sects and denominations. We believe that the fundamental cause of these divisions is that men have departed more or less from the teachings of the Word of God and have supplanted it with authority that is human instead of divine. Our plea is for the return to the Bible ALONE as the sole authority in all matters of religion, and thus to restore primitive Christianity and the unity among believers for which Jesus prayed.

The early disciples were of "one heart and one soul." Within a few generations, however, believers began adding to the Word of Christ the doctrines of men. This resulted in division and culminated in the apostasy of the Church. The good efforts of the Reformation, occurring many centuries later, left believers divided, as each denomination followed different creeds written by men. The greatest error has been the addition of some human authority to the Bible itself. Some accept the Bible plus human creeds; some, plus their own opinion or judgment; and others, the Bible plus some kind of feeling or experience, etc. If the Bible is what we believe it to be, it is the very Word of God, living, indestructible and unchangeable, and enjoining us against any other authority, it seems waiting in the world for every man born of Adam's race to direct his life and destiny.

The Church of Christ can speak assuredly that unity upon God's Word alone can be easily achieved if it is sincerely desired; and that it would unify all lovers of the Lord on earth. (Scripture references: II Tim. 3:16-17; II Peter 1:13; James 1:25; Mark 13:31; John 12:48).



"Howbeit, in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men: for laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." Mark 7:7-9.

The Conditions of Admission Into the Church

The Church of Jesus Christ is the divine institution into which every soul must enter who has any hope of eternal life. Realizing its tremendous importance, we present a scriptural study of the conditions of admission into this sacred body. The word "church" does not appear in the Old Testament scriptures. This is in keeping with the orderly arrangement of the books of the Bible, for the church is strictly a New Testament institution. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John reveal the great preparatory teaching of Jesus and the fundamentals of His religion, but the word "church" does not appear, except twice in Matthew's gospel. Matthew 16:18 reveals its beginning as in the future. Jesus, just before He ascended, revealed to the apostles the conditions of His salvation, Mark 16:15-16, "... preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved . . ." but this the apostles were restrained from preaching until they received the infallible power of the Holy Spirit.

The first chapter of Acts records the ascension of Jesus and the apostles' waiting at Jerusalem. The second chapter records the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the twelve apostles and the beginning of the church. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, preached the risen Jesus as Christ and Lord. The sorrowing believers asked (vs. 37-38), "What shall we do? 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 Spirit." The 41st verse, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized"; verse 47, "And the Lord added to the church daily those that were being saved"; showing that by their faith, repentance and baptism they were saved and by the same process were added to the church.

All the detailed accounts of conversion are recorded in this book of Acts and, although the surrounding incidentals are different, the essential items—faith, repentance and baptism—are present in every case. The 8th chapter, Philip preaching in Samaria and the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch; 9th chapter, conversion of Saul; chapter 10, the first Gentile converts; chapter 16, conversion of Lydia—also the jailer; chapter 18:8, "the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized." These are the God-given conditions and examples, and the teacher who proposes to guide men into the way of salvation is in duty bound to guide them by these models. And the man who believes himself to be a genuine convert to Christ may test his experience by these examples.

The Law of Moses and the Gospel of Christ

The Church of Christ differs from almost all others in regard to the binding effect of the Old and the New Testaments. We believe the Old Testament scriptures to be inspired and necessary to a proper understanding of the New Testament which reveals the gospel of Christ; but the Bible clearly teaches that Christians are under the authority of the new covenant of Christ and not under the old law of God given through Moses for the government of the Jews, exclusively. No Gentile was ever required, or permitted, to keep the law of Moses (except, of course, the few cases of Gentiles proselyted to the Jewish faith). It was a wonderful law and contained, among its many other provisions, the basic moral principles which were taught in the patriarchal dispensation preceding the law of Moses and are also taught under the gospel.

At the close of this article, we list a group of scriptures showing that with the coming of the Christian dispensation the authority of the law of Moses was abolished and taken away. Though it will forever stand as a part of the eternal purposes of God and as an invaluable aid to our better understanding of Christianity, yet as a book of authority to tell us what to do it is not. The gospel is not found in it except in type and in promise. No apostle or preacher or writer of Christ's gospel ever taught Christians to observe the law of Moses. We sincerely believe that if this simple lesson could be learned by believers in Christ, it would remove a world of confusion and division. The way of salvation in Christ is so clearly set out in the New Testament that every student of the Word of God may learn for himself the true doctrine which has been given for us to follow. But if we attempt to find the way of salvation in the law of Moses, or to take part of the Old and part of the New, we shall never be able to find and embrace the great salvation of grace through faith which Christ, our blessed Lord, has provided for all men.

(Hebrews 7:12; Hebrews 8:6-7; Hebrews 10:9; Galatians third chapter; Colossians 2:14-16; Galatians 5:1-4; Romans 6:14; Romans 7:4; Ephesians 2:15; II Corinthians 3:1-11).



"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.

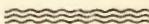
The Strait and Narrow Way

"Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." Matt. 7:13-14.

In reading the gospels, one is struck with what, for lack of a better term, we call Christ's frankness. Luke says a disciple asked Him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" His answer is, perhaps, the hardest truth of his religion. The world speaks of many ways, but Jesus declares, with a touch of severity in his tone, there is no middle way; only two ways; two gates, two foundations; two destinies. He makes no secret of the conditions of discipleships, nor paints in gay colors the Christian life; instead, he emphasizes its hardships and difficulties. He wants no man to come to him believing he is to walk in ease, and so, at the very beginning, he confronts him with an exacting demand, "If any man would be my disciple, let him take up his cross and follow me." Repentance, self-denial and the cross stand at the entrance to the service of God.

The gate is too narrow to admit any worldliness or selfishness or pride: too narrow for any word or doctrine not taught in God's holy Book, as the Lord declares in the verses following.

The way is narrow; not because God willed it so, but because of sin by which man is always surrounded. But for sin all the world might walk abreast in the Way. God wills that all come to repentance. The sinner may come and the poorest of earth may come in, without money and without price. Christ "who giveth grace to the lowly" stands at the door and bids all to enter into the way of salvation, which, like a ruggedly beautiful mountain trail, winds always upward to the summit of our habitation, whose builder and maker is God.



"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.

The Great Commission

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." Mark 16:15-16.

This text is the last recorded words of Christ, spoken to the apostles just before His ascension, as He laid upon them the duty and responsibility of preaching the gospel to "all the world." A mere handful of men, surrounded by every adversity; how they must have recoiled at the sweeping command. Matthew adds these heartening words, "and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," and in Luke 24:49, Jesus restrained them from preaching a word until they were endued with power from on high, which happened ten days later by the miraculous coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost as recorded in the second chapter of Acts.

The commission naturally divides itself into three divisions, "GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD"; unlike the Law of Moses, these parting words stamp Christianity as a universal religion. These marching orders to His ambassadors laid down the great missionary duty of the church. Unto every nation wherever God's sun shall rise and all upon whom it sets, the word and the spirit of the charge reveal it as a religion of activity and conquest for these men and all disciples of Christ as long as the earth shall stand.

"PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE": Unto the rich and poor; the high and low; master and slave; the white, the yellow, the black; wherever and to whomsoever the story of Christ's death for the sins of the world should come, unto him would the great salvation be offered.

"HE THAT BELIEVETH AND IS BAPTIZED SHALL BE SAVED." Now for the first time Christ gives the conditions of His salvation. This was not the badge of any party, no ceremony of any sect, but these were the conditions, and only these, which they were to preach to sinners by which they might be saved. Subsequent New Testament history shows how faithfully this particular instruction was adhered to. "Believeth and is baptized" is the watchword of New Testament teaching, and it was the order and the practice of every Christian conversion recorded in the Bible.

Every one of the twelve apostles, with the exception of John, eventually died a martyr to the faith and have gone to their eternal reward, and every Christian on earth today enjoys whatever of faith and hope he may possess as the fruits of this great commission.

Peter's First Gospel Sermon

The second chapter of the Acts of the Apostles is probably of greater practical importance to those desiring to know the true doctrine of Christianity than any other chapter, and these are the reasons:

It contains the address of Peter speaking for all the apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit which had just descended upon them; it declares the basic principles of the Christian faith; it proclaims for the first time the conditions of salvation and church membership; and it gives a historical account of the establishment of the Church and the first conversions. Realizing its tremendous importance, we quote below from verses 29 to 42 inclusive. Peter is speaking, explaining the Messianic prophecies:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we are all witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

"Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 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. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."

The New Birth

" . . . Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." John 3:5.

In all the Bible, there is no more interesting or meaningful passage of scripture than these words of the Lord, as He likens Christian conversion to a new birth and emphatically declares that no man can come into His kingdom (or church) except he be born of water and of the spirit. Jesus did not explain these words addressed to Nicodemus, but later, when He gave the great commission unto the apostles, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved . . ." (Mark 16:15-16), these words on the new birth were no longer a mystery.

In the parable of the sower, Jesus teaches that the Word of God is the seed of the kingdom, germinating spiritual life in the hearts of men. James 1:18 declares we are begotten with the word of truth, and I Peter 1:23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God . . ." On the day of Pentecost, when the church was established, and later as the apostles went up and down the face of the earth preaching the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit, this Spirit clothed in the word of God begat in the hearts of believers a divine new spiritual life and, with penitent hearts and confessing their faith in Christ, they were immediately baptized in water for the remission of sins. Emerging from the waters of baptism, this figure of the new birth was complete. Thus, they were made, not servants, but children of the spiritual family of God.

Acts of the Apostles contains a historical account of the establishment of the Church and of a multitude of early conversions. Every conversion to Christ recorded in the Bible follows the order above set out: a process at once reasonable and understandable, revealing the handiwork of God in the majesty of its simplicity. Now, with new hearts and a new life and the gift of the Holy Spirit which God has promised unto all baptized believers (Acts 2), these divinely transformed souls began their Christian pilgrimage. Surrounded by the finest fellowship of earth, they rejoiced "with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those that were being saved."

The Ordinance of Baptism

Among the very few ordinances of the Christian religion, the Lord has placed the simple, but all important, rite of baptism. It is a beautiful and meaningful ceremony, and, in the original Greek, the word meant to "immerse" or "plunge." Thus, in conversion when the sinner has believed in Christ and repented of his sins, he is baptized for the remission of his sins—his body gently lowered beneath the water's surface, momentarily breathless, then raised from the "watery grave"—it is a symbol of the burial and resurrection of the Lord. By this act, he completes the conditions of salvation, all his sins are remitted and the Lord adds him to the church. (Acts 2:41-47.)

Unfortunately, in these days many religious bodies try to minimize, or reject altogether, the importance of baptism as a condition of salvation, but God's Word places it equally with faith and repentance, without which conditions no soul is promised forgiveness and eternal life. Many good people believe that salvation, or remission of sins, is an inward experience, a matter of consciousness, effected by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit and usually referred to as a "change of heart." But this conception of remission of sins is not found in the New Testament. This idea is confounded with the change of heart which we know takes place in repentance by which the love of sin is removed, sorrow for it intervenes, love of righteousness springs up and a new heart is created. Repentance is constantly distinguished in the Scriptures from remission of sins which is shown to be subsequent to repentance by "repentance and remission of sins" and kindred scriptures. Remission of sins takes place in the mind of God and not in the heart of the sinner.

Note the great commission Jesus gave to His apostles (Mark 16:15-16), "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." In the first gospel sermon ever preached (Acts 2:38), Peter instructs these stricken believers to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . ." Ananias, instructing Saul (Acts 22:16), "Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins . . ." And in I Peter 3:21, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us . . ." In every case of conversion where the details are given baptism is always mentioned. Faith and repentance are present also, either expressed or implied, but Divinity, as if anticipating the errors of men, names baptism in every case.

A World for a Soul

"For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Some scriptures seem almost to shout at us: to grasp and turn us around to behold what we have failed to see. The disciples were only men hoping Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom whereby they would all be honored and profited. He, trying to teach them a principle of divine philosophy, the necessity of self-denial, concluded with these challenging and awful questions of our text. They are addressed not only to the disciples, but to everyone of earth to whom He has given breath and reason, as the great Teacher warns us of the folly of exchanging our eternal life for any or all the wealth or glory or sinful pleasures of the whole world.

We may ask, "Has not God made the earth for man to enjoy?" Yes, indeed, but not to the exclusion of the Maker thereof. He has made us to sit at the table of His providence, but He desires our communion and our conversation as He strives to prevent our loving the creation more than the Creator.

One truth that is surely taught from "cover to cover" of the old Book is the folly of coveting worldly wealth or glory and their detriment to the soul. Yet the inordinate desire for these things is perhaps our most universal fault. Blessed is the man who can possess these things and retain spirituality! He is one of God's noblemen—but he is the exception. A leading scientist (having been a skeptic most of his life) recently declared that wide learning does not make men happy unless the learned has found God. Man is a personal being; he was made for God.

At Aix-la-Chapelle is the tomb of the great emperor, Charlemagne. Something of a reformer in his day, the manner of his burial is a great sermon. Beneath the dome, sitting in a marble chair of kings, a book of the gospel lay open in his lap, his lifeless finger pointing to this scripture, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?" He had known the wisdom of the Master's reasoning.

Christianity is a reasonable religion, and it is more. It is a way of life, for it is described as a highway in which the redeemed walk together. They are not denied happiness, but have the finest joys of earth, nor are any of the good things of life from them withheld. They have learned to set their affections on higher things; to trust in God's boundless grace by which it is all provided, having a foretaste of the real treasures laid up for them in Heaven.

Saving and Teaching Grace

"For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." Titus 2:11-12.

This second chapter of Paul's letter to the young preacher, Titus, is a most excellent portion of Scripture. It has been described as a creed, a system of ethics and a textbook for every gospel preacher. Every command of God rests upon some great truth. Here Paul is instructing Titus to teach the Cretans to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts and to live sober, righteous and godly lives, and he introduces it with these words on the grace of God which is the finest truth of all revelation. Grace has been called the child of love—the parent of mercy, and, as a tree puts forth its fruit in season, God's grace, moved by love which is His essence, is the putting forth of His power to bring redemption within the reach of all men.

The words of our text—"hath appeared"—reveal that this gracious salvation had existed for ages in the mind and heart of God. Now, in the fullness of time, it appears like the rising sun on a benighted world. The prophet Malachi refers to the coming of Christ as "the Sun of righteousness with healing in his wings." When the Babe was born of the virgin in Bethlehem, the angels knew the dawn of day had come when Christ should die for the sins of the world and that the healing in his wings should extend backward to save the faithful under the first covenant and forward to cleanse and make whole all faithful in Christ of future ages. At last, the "Sun of righteousness" had appeared to wither and dry up the seeds of sin and to bring "life and immortality to light through the gospel."

Salvation is ours by the grace of God. It has been brought to all men, but Paul does not say that all men have received it. There is a world of difference. Scholars tell us the word in the original translated "that bringeth salvation" means PURPOSE or POSSIBILITY and not actuality. The words of our text reveal it not only as a saving grace but a teaching grace as well. We behold by every line of the New Testament Scriptures the administration and workings of this great salvation through the medium of teaching, for, without the teaching and preaching of Christ's gospel and its being believed and obeyed by men, grace is unavailing to save. But with every condition kept and complied with, it is still by grace; by unmerited favor—"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Ephesians 2:8.

Joy From the Wells of Salvation

"Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." Isaiah 12:3.

Palestine was a hot, semi-arid country. Wells of cool water were almost sacred. The Bible abounds in beautiful figures of wells, fountains and rivers of water as emblems of God's spiritual blessings. The above is a fitting text, as Isaiah speaks prophetically of the Christian religion. The heart of Christianity is the joy to be derived from it, as inspiration reveals on almost every page. "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice," was the heartening cry of the Apostle Paul as he wrote the Philippian letter, an epistle of joy, from his Roman prison.

The log churches of the pioneers were filled with worshippers whose joy in their religion knew no bounds. We fear the religion and worship of our modern day has lost much of the joy God intended it to bring; and that formality, custom and dignity have, in a greater or less degree, replaced the heavenly graces of brotherly love, spirituality and heart-felt religion. No earthly joy compares with the pleasure of the peaceable assembly for worship; the mutual prayers; the songs of Zion; the Christian fellowship; the hearing of God's holy Word; the communion; and realizing above all that God's grace has provided these blessings for us to enjoy.

Let us never imagine God looks askance at human happiness, for His "rejoice and be exceeding glad" and kindred scriptures reveal that joy is laid upon us as a duty as well as a privilege. It is true He sanctifies sorrow, as a discipline and a preparation, but only that it might be turned into joy.

The finest joy comes from sacrifice. This is not easily seen but, as a mother is happier when toiling and sacrificing to rear her children than in later years at ease, so the Christian's truest happiness is in self-denial and the sacrifices he makes for the Lord and for his fellow man.

Blessed is he who greatly rejoices as he draws the water of life from the wells of God's salvation.



"Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." Isaiah 51:11.

The Great Salvation

"How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him." Hebrews 2:3.

Recently we drove through the cemetery, beholding the number of new mounds and monuments; unconsciously we walked across a grave unmarked and doubtless forgotten; then paused a moment by our family lot. The language of the philosopher came to us, "If a man could know the reality of his death, the horror of its approach would drive him insane." We know this is not the Christian attitude—but what of those out of Christ!

Then occurred these words "great salvation," and we thought "how great" no tongue or pen of men shall ever be able to describe. Jesus spoke much more of the woes of the lost than of the joys of Heaven. We know salvation cannot be less than commensurate with the awful destiny we have escaped. But it is much more, for the joys and glories of an everlasting life await all the faithful in Christ at the resurrection.

Our text teaches Jesus only began to speak the truths of salvation. In his life and ministry as the incarnate Son of God, he laid the principles and foundation of his religion. His sacrifice for the sins of the world was in his death, and unto the apostles, who heard him preach and upon whom the Holy Spirit descended on Pentecost, was committed the authority to reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven and to proclaim the great salvation to the whole world.

For 1,500 years, from the giving of the Law of Moses until the death of Christ, there is not a single commandment to the Gentile world. There are individual cases of Gentiles becoming Jews, but the Jews were not commanded to preach their religion to the world. Neither was eternal salvation provided for them. In the five books of Moses, the religious system of the Jews, is no mention of a future existence. Their prophets were divinely inspired to predict the coming of a Redeemer. Hebrews 9:15 reveals that the faithful under the law of Moses were redeemed by Christ. Thus the saving power of his blood flowed backward to cleanse those who died before him and flowed forward to cleanse the faithful as long as time shall last.

It is a salvation for all: Jew and Gentile, the rich and poor, the white and black, the yellow and the brown: It cleanses the sinful, makes holy the vile, lifts up the fallen and takes away the sting of death. Devised and planned by our heavenly Father, executed by Jesus Christ and consummated by God's Holy Spirit, we rejoice in "so great salvation."

Freedom From Care

"In nothing be anxious, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God." Phil. 4:6.

The words of this commandment are neither hard nor exacting; but come to us as if the Father had put His loving arm about us and pulled us up closer to Him and had bidden us, like little children, to forget our cares and leave everything to Him as He tries to help us worrying pilgrims along. They are precious and comforting words, but hard to obey. Yet those few which we have known who walked by this rule always appear to be happy.

"In nothing be anxious"; it seems impossible! The text does not mean we are not to be industrious and fore-thoughtful. This same apostle also said, "If any man will not work, neither shall he eat." The thing he seeks to deliver man from is the worry and over-solicitude of world affairs with which they struggle, trying to be their own providence; wearing themselves out in anxieties about future events which they cannot remedy or control, if indeed they are ever to happen.

"Let your requests be made known to God." He did not create this world and all things therein and go far away and forsake it until time shall be no more: but always "His eyes are over the righteous and His ears are open unto their prayers," and as surely as there is a God in Heaven, He wants His children to be happy, untroubled and unafraid.

Sometimes we would give everything to attain this ideal. Perhaps it is not so difficult if we would really try. The great essential is a real trusting faith in God. The avenue is through prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Prayer is the great lever of spiritual life; the lung by which it breathes. If we pray with thankful hearts, half of our troubles will disappear. He has not promised us miracles nor that every request shall be granted, but His loving watchcare, and the "peace that passeth all understanding" and "my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." These are all promised in this chapter.

Many are the hearts that have found this peace by faith and obedience to His Holy Will. "Many are the hearts that are weary tonight" when, in His blessed Kingdom, they might have rest.

Reality of Eternal Life

"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." I Cor. 13:12.

Historians tell us no people ever lived that did not believe in a future life; that man is the only animal to entomb his dead; and that stones were used to make sepulchres before they were used for houses. However vain or vague these savage hopes might have been, it is an evidence that somewhere was a golden truth of which these were the counterfeit.

The language of our text and many other scriptures leave no doubt that eternal life is as real as life on earth, with a personality and consciousness unbroken. The golden thread of eternal life begins with man's regeneration and reaches its final fruition when by death he is delivered into the hands of his Maker. A foretaste of Heaven is extended to him on earth as he, whom grace has made free, begins his heavenward journey, with a new heart and life and surrounded by the finest fellowship this world has ever known. Through trials and adversities he is sustained by God's promises which form the basis of his hope of eternal life. He is ever comforted by these words, "And the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." I Thess. 4:17.

Finally the battle will be over; the pilgrimage ended; the armor of light unlaced; the sword and shield laid down at the Master's feet; and the soft garment of eternal peace put on. Then he shall come face to face with all the glories now but dimly seen, and, with loved ones and all the redeemed of earth, he really knows even as he is known.

Gentle reader, the Bible teaches the reality of heaven. Let no philosophy of man rob you of this most precious providence of God. Let earth if it will be a mist or a shadow; all above is an enduring substance.



"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." John 15:1-3.

The Love of God

"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 3:16.

Jesus here seems to declare in one comprehensive sentence the essence of the Christian faith. For 1900 years, this scripture has blessed the world, but those years have thrown no new light upon its quality. It still stands, as always, the Golden Text of the Bible. Luther called this verse, "The Bible in miniature"; others, "the rock upon which Christianity rests"; "a gospel within a gospel"; "the silver clarion ringing high above the din of strife, stirring soldiers of the cross to continue the struggle." Yet no commentary of man seems sufficient, and we turn again to the words of our text as gold instead of silver.

We mortals, summoning all our faith, try to realize this divine Being (said to be love Himself); see Him creating a world in love and immortal souls upon which His love might be bestowed; then climaxing it all by giving His divine Son for the sins of a world when sin was at its greatest height in history. We catch a glimpse of divinity even if we do not understand it. "God was in Christ" and in giving His son, He gave Himself as far as we were able to receive Him. One figure portrays "the great lake, God; the river, Christ; the pitcher, "whosoever believeth"; and the draught, "eternal life." We should never think of God as hard and exacting, made mild only by Christ. They are one in their loving nature. Neither let us suppose God is so loving He will not punish evil. In the bosom of the heavenly message of our text is the beat of an infinite heart, but also the majesty of a holy will. Belief in Christ includes full trust and obedience, and "whosoever" destroys the old doctrine of individual election taught by Calvin, which has long hindered the progress of Christianity.

This great blessing has a sad counterpart in the response it has received from men. An offering and a provision intended to make us supremely happy and solve every problem including death itself is for the most part rejected. The door of "whosoever believeth" is still ajar, but he who dies without Christ has closed this door against himself forever. Yet, while there is still life and breath and the long-suffering of God, Jesus by the sentiment of these sweet words stands lovingly knocking at the door of every heart.

Paul's Great Resolution

"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." Phil. 3:13-14.

Good resolutions of New Year's Day are always commendable, but the life of the Apostle Paul was a constant renewal and strengthening and deepening of his resolve to attain the resurrection of the dead referred to in verse eleven of this chapter and which he calls "the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

"Forgetting those things which are behind": Paul bore throughout his life the bitter memories of a misdirected past when in ignorance of the genuineness of Christianity, he was its chief persecutor. This he "did in all good conscience before God," teaching us that conscience misdirected by error is an unsafe guide in religion. Strictly speaking, the continuity of life cannot be broken and the past rolled up and forgotten, yet by the grace of Almighty God and the blood of Christ to whom he had been converted, Paul stood, like every regenerated man, completely forgiven, his soul as white as snow. No Christian should carry the burden of past mistakes. He may profit by them, but their guilt and effects must be forgotten.

Paul knew he had not attained to eternal life. Now in the figure of a race to be run, he avows his purpose of a relentless zeal and determination to obtain that most precious blessing of Christ's gospel—the resurrection from the dead to a joyous eternal life. Though genuinely converted to Christianity, his writings are replete with warnings to Christians of the danger of falling, buffeting his own body "lest by any means when I have preached to others, I myself shall be a castaway."

"This one thing I do": Paul knew that Christian perfection can only be attained by definite and strenuous endeavor. Faith and purpose serve to animate our efforts, but they will never be accepted as substitutes for performance. God lays upon every Christian the duty of activity and labor in the Master's vineyard. There is no salvation for the indolent, half-hearted Christian.

Paul here seems to view eternity across the white line at the end of life's race. Once he had been caught up into heaven for a glimpse of that country whence no traveler ever returns. Now he leaves this great resolution to hearten and inspire believers in Christ until He comes again to raise Paul and all the faithful in a glorious resurrection.

The Great Light

"The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephtholim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." Matthew 4:15-16.

This language of Isaiah which Matthew quotes promised these war-ridden countries that Christ as the "great light" should dispel the darkness which wars and their own depravity had settled upon them. Today with the whole world enveloped in such a darkness, we, like they, seem waiting again for the great light's dawn. The Scriptures abound in figures of Jesus as "the light of the world" and of His followers as bearers and reflectors of light. No event of history has so affected world affairs as the coming of Christ and wherever His light has been permitted to shine, darkness has disappeared. Primarily, the diffusion of His light operates in the hearts and lives of men—and in the midst of darkness they still walk in the light. Secondarily, "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ" through the influence of faithful disciples, has blessed every nation it has ever touched.

Perhaps, today, all Christendom might honestly confess how we have failed, as light bearers, as reflectors of the light we have received, or to carry the gospel to nations in darkness; or to have stood in the way to cast a shadow by our lack of unity and of love; until now the great light is so obscured that war has cast a shadow into every home on earth.

Some sweet day this war will be over, and our boys will come home. Much has been said of what good things for them we may provide. It seems a challenge to provide for them and before them a real Christianity. Not ecclesiasticism, not denominationalism, not a Sunday religion and a week of selfishness, not forever a commercial strife between nations, but the faith, the spirit and the love of the primitive church. Let us pour the balm of the gospel into the wounds of bleeding countries; in every soil plant the "tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations," that they may be bound together by the bond of love, and wars may be no more. Such a vision would be a reality if the great light were permitted, in every land, to shine in the hearts of men.

Everything or Nothing

If Christianity is anything, it is everything, and means infinitely more to everyone of us than all our earthly possessions—yea, than life itself. No truth is more surely taught in the Bible than that Christ came to earth to sacrifice His life for our sins and to found a system of religion, a plan of salvation, by which every person of earth might obtain eternal life. No man has any promise of salvation unless he is completely converted according to this God-given design and then lives a faithful Christian life. To this, all informed students of the Bible agree. Yet, in this land that nominally accepts Christianity, there is a widespread tendency to treat this greatest heritage with an unexplainable indifference.

When our Lord, just before His ascension, gave unto His apostles the great commission, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned," it was the motive that sent them into every corner of the earth to bear the good tidings. The flaming torch of this gospel message was flung by these ambassadors "to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also." Yet today, with all our liberties and opportunities, it seems impossible to interest the masses in the hope of eternal life.

Perhaps the attitude of many professed followers of Christ has largely contributed to this spiritual apathy. From somewhere has come a widely prevalent idea that a kind of passive belief in Christ or a certain moral standard, coupled with a funeral eulogy by a kind-hearted minister, will suffice to open the gates of the eternal city. Nothing could be further from New Testament teachings which reveal that eternal life is for only those who have complied with Christ's terms of the great salvation. Some day, very soon, we shall all be ushered into a never-ending eternity. He who in that day has a hope founded upon the Word of God has everything, but he who has neglected to lay hold upon the redemption brought within his reach has nothing but to face a darkness so terrible that it is indescribable.



"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear the voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life: and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." John 5:28-29.

The Virgin Birth

"Therefore the Lord Himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Isaiah 7:14.

Seven hundred years after Isaiah spoke these words, Gabriel, the trusted angel of God, appeared in the little Galilean city of Nazareth. He bore the now famous message of annunciation to a faithful Jewish maiden named Mary. We imagine her consternation and surprise that she had been granted the highest favor ever bestowed upon a woman. She was to bear a son, begotten within her virgin body by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit; his name was to be "Jesus"; he was to be a King upon the throne of David from whom Mary was descended; and he was to be known as the Son of God.

The inspired pens of Matthew and Luke record the story of the virgin birth of our Lord in the first chapters of their gospels. They offer no explanation, but with sublime simplicity use only the words of the divine messenger. The substance of this angelic message and its fulfillment forms the cornerstone of the Christian faith. It is the first gospel truth most of us learned at the knee of our own blessed mother, and many have said that it has given greater depth and reality to the Christian religion than any other event, not excepting the resurrection. The incarnation of Christ, inaugurating a new life, itself to be created in the lives of men, implies a new kind of birth. His birth by the power of the Holy Spirit with the blessed virgin adequately supplies the means for the pre-existent Christ to assume a fleshly form. As he was ever the Son of God, living a sinless life and a Savior from sin, the virgin birth appears more reasonable than if were said to be natural.

Upon the integrity of this gospel record of the virgin birth rests Jesus' divinity—and upon His divinity depends our salvation. Blessed and worthy is the gospel preacher who proclaims "the whole counsel of God" exactly as the Book of God reveals it. The greatest enemy of Christianity is he would supplant any revealed truth of God with the opinions or doctrines of men.



"For unto us a child is born, 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." Isaiah 9:6.

John, the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved

Perhaps no man can say who was greatest among our Lord's apostles, but today we are thinking of him who is called, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," the Apostle John. He was the youngest of the twelve, about 25 years old when he first met Jesus, and in the first chapter of his gospel, written 50 years later, John recalls the day and the hour of this meeting.

All authorities agree he was not the weak, almost effeminate character portrayed in Leonardo Da Vinci's picture, "The Last Supper." Reared a Galilean fisherman, he was fearless, rugged and hard, with a very loving and tender heart. Jesus named John and James, his brother, Boanerges which means "sons of thunder." In the ninth chapter of Luke's gospel, Jesus rebukes John twice—for his intolerance toward an outside disciple and when he proposed to call down fire from Heaven to consume the Samaritan village which denied hospitality to the Master. Jesus loved him for, though sometimes intolerant, he was fearless and firm in decision and loyalty. When all the others forsook the Lord in his passion, John clung close to him, went alone with him into the judgment hall, and stood at the foot of the cross from which Jesus committed to him the care of his mother.

John's type of piety reflects his close personal touch with the Lord, which is a lesson to many of us who follow him—but so far away. The deep opening words of John's gospel displays his profound knowledge, and yet his gospel and epistles are filled with simple lessons of love a child can understand. John 3:16 is the golden text of all Scripture. He is the author of that sentence of sentences, "God is Love," and such as, "Little children, love one another"; "Jesus wept"; "we are sons of God," and "If any man sin, he has an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Lord."

John lived probably to an age of 115 years—at least, long after the other apostles died in martyrdom.

At the Last Supper, the usually talkative Peter requested John to ask the Lord an important question, receiving his answer through John. Today it seems John's writings are personal answers to many questions of our own. "John, ask Jesus about Heaven." He answers in Revelation, "He showed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem"; "No more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain"; "A pure river of water of life"; "The tree of life"; "The face of God," and "The Spirit and the bride say come."

The Province of Miracles in the Church

Reason teaches us that any supernatural claim or proposition must be supported by supernatural proof. Accordingly, all direct revelations from God have been attended by a disruption of natural laws in the phenomena of miracles.

Shortly after Jesus ascended, a great miracle occurred, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles. It gave them power to preach the gospel unerringly, and later to write it in the books of the New Testament as it was revealed unto them. Thus it became to all believers the very Word of God. It also gave these men power to perform miracles so that their hearers might know they spoke by divine authority. The record shows that the apostles imparted to other individuals certain miraculous powers called "spiritual gifts" which enabled them to teach correctly and strengthen the faith of the disciples in the infant church, for as yet they had no New Testament scriptures to guide them. These individuals received their miraculous powers by the laying on of hands of the apostles, but they were not able to impart these "gifts of the Spirit" to a third party. The evangelist Phillip preaching in Samaria, though able to perform miracles himself, yet Peter and John were sent unto him to impart spiritual gifts to his converts. (Acts 8.)

As far as the Scriptures reveal, miracles were confined to the apostolic age and were intended to cease. First Corinthians 13:8 shows conclusively that these gifts were to cease, so does Ephesians 4:11-16. Miraculous inspiration was indispensable as the gospel was preached and as it was written but when this was completed, the need for them passed away. Like straws that have produced their grain and are thrown aside, these miracles had produced and confirmed the faith of the infant church and now as the church moved into the steady light of the written word, miracles ceased, but their fruits remain to bless mankind forevermore. As creation began in a miracle and was continued in natural order, so Christianity began in miracles and is perpetuated by the gracious system of the gospel, God's power unto salvation.

There is no scriptural account of a miracle or miraculous gift ever bringing pardon to any individual. Even the great miracle of Christ's appearance to Saul of Tarsus and the miracle at the house of Cornelius did not bring pardon to those men, but they had to comply with the established terms of pardon which are alike for all mankind.

Miracles have passed away, but we revel in the blessings of God's loving providence and care; in the pure gospel recorded in

the Bible; in grace, mercy and peace; in faith, hope and love; all these and many more abide to bless and lift us up as our faith is increased, being rooted and grounded in the integrity of those early miracles by which all this was created and established. John 20:30-31.

Jesus, the Unique and Supreme

In contrast with the greatest men of earth, Jesus stands alone, towering so much above all others that it is easier to make Him divine than human. Since time began, all peoples have adored the supernatural and have anticipated a future existence. Therefore, we may well ask, "Is there a bright home skyward where naught that blooms shall die?" If so, has God revealed it, and by whom? By the Magi of Persia, Buddha of India, Confucius of China, Mohammed of Arabia, or Jesus of Palestine? The candid truth is, the one religion lifting up the race and giving hope of future life is that of Jesus, the Christ, Lord of lords, and priest of the most high God.

There is probably more proof of His life, labors, death and resurrection than of the life and conquests of Alexander, Caesar, or Hannibal. How wonderful are His teachings! Speaking "as never man spake," He first taught humility as the road to greatness and first taught mercy to the world as a principle—"Love your enemies," "Blessed are the pure in heart," the golden rule—there is perhaps no institution of love and mercy which He cannot claim. Born in poverty, He taught the widest philanthropy. Uneducated, He uttered the wisest sayings of all time. He never wrote but a single sentence in the sand, but His life and His words are recorded in the books of every civilized nation of earth. He changed the times and the seasons, the laws and literature of the whole world. He blessed little children and made them models of the coming kingdom.

The mission of His life was love. Though poor and lone, He bade the weary come unto Him for rest. Before Jesus' day, no word of comfort was heard at the side of any grave. He revolutionized the world in three years, revolutionized death in three days and revolutionized Heaven the day He ascended, as angelic hosts cried aloud, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates . . . and the king of glory shall come in." He entered and "for the suffering of death was crowned." From His celestial throne, He now commands the ages as they roll on. Some bright day, He shall come again to gather the redeemed of all the ages to dwell with him on the peaceful shore where no storms ever beat and the tenderest broken ties of earth shall be united—by this carpenter's boy—this eternal God.

The Lord's Supper

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them." Acts 20:7.

The death of Christ is the basic truth of the Christian system. Every blessing the Christian enjoys and every promise in which he believes is rooted and grounded in the sacrificial death and blood of the Lord.

On the night of His betrayal, after Jesus had observed the Feast of the Passover with His disciples, He gave them the simple institution which was to commemorate His death until He comes again. Luke 22:19-20 gives this account: "And he took the 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." Thereafter it is referred to as the Lord's Supper, breaking of bread, or the communion. Its observance, as indicated by our text and other scriptures, was upon the first day of every week. At these meetings they engaged in other features of worship and service to God, but the primary purpose of the assembly of these early Christians on each Lord's Day was to observe this institution which kept fresh in their minds the death of the Lord for the remission of sins.

The breaking of bread reminds us of His broken body in the crucifixion, and the fruit of the vine is an emblem of His precious blood shed for the sins of the world. Thus on each Lord's Day in the impressive stillness of the communion service, we preach again the great gospel sermon in pantomime.

It seems the Lord has given our religion a body. Faith is spiritual. It must be in the heart. But we are slow of understanding and so infirm in our spiritual conceptions that God has given our religion a body, and as it were, has clothed our spiritual faith in the material body of fitting memorials, the Lord's Supper and baptism. These we can see and understand and their nature is such that they do not make our religion formal, but they exalt the objects of our faith and make it more spiritual.

The Lord's Supper portrays to our minds what the world cannot appreciate: that Jesus at the climax of His greatness was truly "the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world."

The Hope of Immortality

It was midnight in Jerusalem. The soft silvery light of a full Passover moon shed its radiance upon a little group of men whose dejection must have showed in every line of their faces. For these were the disciples of Christ—and it was the night when every hope for which they had lived had been buried in the tomb with their Master. Defeated, discouraged, beaten, they were men whose lives seemed not worth the living.

Then came the resurrection. Within a few short hours of that event these whipped and beaten men became the boldest and most courageous characters to be found in the whole Roman empire. Something had happened to them! An incredible change had taken place. From the depth of gloom and despair they were transformed into radiant, triumphant evangels of the new gospel. They had seen the risen Savior. They knew the certainty of the things where-in they had put their trust.

In these days of darkest suffering and world-wide sorrow, it would be well for us to recapture the resilience of spirit which the resurrection brought to these disciples. They had an elasticity of heart, an ineffable ability to "become back" from disaster and adversity. Indeed, this attitude has ever characterized those who truly believe in immortality. All the anguish and darkness of the present hour are dispelled by the unshakeable conviction that our fleeting earthly sorrows are "not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed."

Their hope of immortality gathered up their scattered loyalties and interests and focused them into one unalterable and irrevocable purpose. With boldness and resolution Peter declared, "We cannot but speak the things which we saw and heard." All the discordant elements, their discorded and fragmentary ambitions, were at last brought into one all-consuming and passionate determination—to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ.

As a result of these transformations—from despair to joyous triumph and from irresolution to fixedness of purpose—the lives of these Christians began to show a radiance and an exultance that caused the heathen world to stare in unbelieving astonishment. Without question much of the impotency and ineffectiveness of our modern Christianity can be traced directly to lack of this joyousness, this radiance. The withering hand of modernism in the pulpit and worldliness in the pew has simply emasculated the gospel of Christ. Let all true disciples return to the gloriously triumphant faith of the early disciples: let us build our hopes and our lives on the imperishable truth that "because he lives, we too shall live!"

