

"For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?"

THE GOSPEL TRUMPETER
USPS #871620

Periodicals postage paid at the post office in Newark, Ohio 43055.

POSTMAN, send form 3579 to the printer:

THE GOSPEL TRUMPETER
675 N. Cedar Street
Newark, Ohio 43055

This periodical carries no subscription price; however, it is partially maintained through the gifts and offerings of its readers, with the balance of the expenses being paid by the local congregation.

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This monthly religious journal is published for the benefit of the Church of God universally. It is our supreme purpose to reach the world for Christ through the printed page. Our burden is to reveal the truth of God's Word to all mankind, to expose sin and error, war against apostasy, and to eradicate the longstanding traditions of men that have no biblical foundations.

Brother Roger L. Decker Editor
Workers Too Numerous to Mention

THE CHURCH OF GOD BELIEVES IN:

- A personal God (John 4:24)
- A divine Christ (John 1:1, 14)
- An infallibly inspired Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17)
- Salvation from sin (Matt. 1:21)
- The new birth (John 3:3, 5-7)
- A holy life (Luke 1:73-75; Titus 2:12)
- Sanctification (1 Thess. 5:23)
- Unity of God's people (John 17:21, Eph. 4)
- Divine, physical healing (James 5:14-16)
- The ordinances (Matt. 28:19-20; John 13:1 Cor. 11:23, 34)
- Eternal life (Matt. 25:46; Mark 9:43)
- The Trinity (1 John 5:7, 8)

**SOME SPIRITUAL FACTS
PERTAINING TO THE CHURCH**

- Jesus organized it (Matt. 16:18)
- On a good foundation (Eph. 2:20; 1 Cor. 3:11)
- Christ governs it (Eph. 1:22-23; Isa. 9:6)
- God admits members (1 Cor. 12:13-18)
- Sin puts you out of it (Rom. 11:22; Ex. 32:33)
- The saved only are members (John 15:2-6)
- Membership is offered to all (Rev. 22:17)
- Final rewards (Rev. 20:12-15; 21:3-4; 22:14)
- Bible name of the Church (Acts 20:28; Gal. 1:13; John 17:11)

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Website: www.godsacres.org

Vol. 33 December 2003 No. 12

Guest Editorial

What Does the Bible Teach About the Rapture?

Part 1 of 2

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

17 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.

Anyone exposed to religious teaching has been exposed to the terminology of "the rapture." The Scripture text referenced above is one frequently employed by advocates of this doctrine. This teaching raises several questions such as, What is the rapture? What does it mean? and Is it a Bible teaching? These are questions that we want to address in this article.

The word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible. It is a term that was coined by religious teachers. Some attribute its beginning to the Counter-Reformation in the sixteenth century. Those who are studied in that era state that when the reformers of the sixteenth-century reformation began to apply many prophetic Scriptures to the papacy, Rome countered with the development of futuristic interpretations of a host of Scriptures. In this development the term "rapture" was coined.

According to Webster's New World Dictionary, the word *rapture* means, "a carrying away or being carried away in body or spirit." The common teaching espoused by pre-millennial dispensationalists states that Christ will come "as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2) and steal away the church; they say then there will be a tribulation period, after which Christ will supposedly come again to set up the kingdom and usher in an age of millennial reign.

Let us consider some of the supposed proof texts used by advocates of this teaching to see if this is what the Bible teaches.

First, let us consider our Scripture text: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first [not first before unbelievers, but before 'we which are alive']; Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [the dead in Christ] in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." This passage speaks of the Lord descending with a *shout* and with the *trump*. This would hardly seem compatible with a secret stealing away. Also, Acts 20:28 tells us that he "purchased [the church] with his own blood." Why would He need to steal away something that He purchased?

Jesus let us know that when He made His next advent into this world, it would be a universally observed event. In Matthew 24:27 Jesus said, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." The Scriptures do not teach multiple returns of Christ or multiple resurrections. Acts 24:15 speaks of "a [singular] resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust [occurring at the same time]." The Bible speaks of only one future coming of our Lord. Hebrews 9:28 refers to it by saying ". . . shall he appear the second time. . . ."

The Apostle Peter penned in response to the question, "Where is the promise of his coming?" (2 Peter 3:4) that ". . . the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). Again, we read of "a great noise," which is incompatible with the idea of a secret stealing away. Also, we see that when "the day of the Lord" comes, the same day the Apostle Paul spoke of in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, then "we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them [verse 16: the dead] in the clouds"

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Isaiah 28:16 Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.

17 Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place.

The Christmas Season



Brother Roger L. Decker

"Hail Shall Sweep Away the Refuge of Lies"

The Prophet said that hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. What did the Prophet mean by *hail*? He was talking about solid Truth. Deuteronomy 32:1-2 tells us: "Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass." Doctrine will fall as rain, and hail is rain in a solid form. Solid Truth will sweep away the refuge of lies and over-

flow the hiding place. You cannot refute Truth. How does it sweep away the refuge of lies? By revealing the truth.

Read the words of Jesus in John 8:30-32: "As he spake these words, many believed on him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Discipleship starts with believing, and then one must continue in the Word. Discipleship also involves knowing the Truth, and the Truth will make you free.

Revelation 13:1 reads, "And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and

saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy." Here we find that a beast rose out of the sea. The sea is people, and a humanistic religion rose from the sea. Isaiah 57:20 says, "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." Mire and dirt are all that the wicked cast up. The wicked, or those who are void of the Spirit of God, do not have clean hearts.

In Revelation 13:4 we find that the beast received power: "And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they wor-

shipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?" Verses 5-8 state: "And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies. . . . And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints [it was not given unto him to *make* saints, but to make *war* with the saints]. . . . And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

I want to get into some things that are a carry-over from the beast, from pagan worship, or beast worship. We are in a season right now that seems to start earlier each year. People no more than finish up the season, and then they prepare for the next. This holiday is called Christmas, but it is not a Christian holiday. Now, please stay with me. There are Christians who do partake of it. I am not bringing the message to unchristianize anyone or to say that a person who participates in it is not a Christian. Many do not have the light that we are privileged to have. Jesus said you would know the Truth, and the Truth would make you free.

"Love Not the World"

Hebrews 5:11-14 says: "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." Paul said milk belongs to

babes, but strong meat belongs to those who are of full age.

Matthew 1:21 says, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." This Scripture lets us know that the primary mission of Jesus Christ was to save His people from their sins. Today we have a Christless world trying to rejoice that the Savior was born and trying to celebrate what He came to do. Someone may ask, "What is wrong with that?" Well, a Christless world does not and cannot rejoice and celebrate the birth of the Savior. Why? According to the Bible, the world is against Christ; it is not for Him.

John 7:6-7 tells us: "Then Jesus said unto them, My time is not yet come: but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil." The latter part of James 4:4 says, ". . . whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the *enemy* of God." First John 2:15-17 reads: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

What do we see today? People who have never been delivered from sin are trying to love, rejoice, and praise God, but it is a big sham. Galatians 5:22-23 tells us: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law." Real praise, real joy, real peace, and real love come from the heart. If your heart is not right, the Bible lets you know you are against God; you are not for Him. Someone may say, "That is very upsetting." Well, I am sure it is, but let us study it.

"Try the Spirits"

First John 4:1 says, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." John said to *try* the spirits. How can we know when something is not of God? If it is not of God, it will not line up with the Word of God; it will not line up with the principles of God's Word.

Let us take a Scripture and see how it lines up with the spirit that is motivating the custom, or the tradition, of Christmas. It is amazing that some people say that long hair on women is a custom when there is more in the Bible about the hair than about Christmas.

Luke 16:14-15 states: "And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." This Scripture is a good Scripture to use to weigh things.

There is not one country that does not celebrate Christmas. Even countries that are anti-God, such as the communist countries, celebrate it. Jesus said, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God [not in men's sight, but in God's sight]." I say again, this is a good balance to use to weigh things. If the millions who are living in sin and ungodliness and the corruption of this world can rejoice in Christmas and esteem it highly, that ought to let God's people know that it is an abomination in the sight of God.

Many people in the world, and even many religious people, like to put the Christian on a guilt trip if he does not overindulge in Christmas. They say that he is depriving his children. They try to put a person on a guilt trip by saying,

"Aren't you even going to buy your children something?" I buy my children something; I buy them things all year round. I do not have to wait until one certain day of the year. However, the vast majority who indulge in the festival of Christmas do not even allow their children to go to Sunday school or church. Now, who is depriving their children? Who is doing what is right in the eyes of God? That is what we want to study. What does God think about Christmas?

Many do not think a thing of getting drunk and sleeping in on Sunday morning, as long as they have Christmas. This is the spirit that is in the world. Men highly esteem this holiday more than going to Sunday school and church.

John said to try the spirits, to see whether they are of God. Let us put the Word of God alongside the festival of Christmas. The devil has deceived people in convincing them that Christmas is Christian. Most people think when they enter the Christmas season that they are entering a Christian celebration, but the truth is, there is nothing Christian about it. It is just a festival.

The Origin of Christmas

Where did the tradition of Christmas come from? It came from Roman Catholicism, and they got it from the pagans who had a similar festival to worship the *sun god*. Roman Catholicism dressed it up and changed the focus from the *sun god* to the *Son of God*. The word *Christmas* came from the Roman Catholics; they put the two words *Christ* and *mass* together to form the word *Christmas*. However, Christ does not have anything to do with mass; they do not go together. Commentators will tell you that they do not know when Christ was born. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

God hid the exact time of His birth because He did not want people to celebrate it. The Apostles put no emphasis on His birth. Knowing the time of His birth is meaningless. However, the world does put emphasis on His birth. The Christian puts emphasis on His death, burial, and resurrection. This is what is important. Without His death, burial, and resurrection, there would be no sacrifice for sin, no losing of the Spirit of God, and no victory.

First Corinthians 15:12-17 reads: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins."

According to the world, the resurrection of Christ was vain. They put all the emphasis on His birth. To the world Christ has not risen, because they are still in their sins. Though commentators and Bible students do not know the date and time of Jesus' birth, they do know that it was *not* December 25. Most commentators are honest about this; you can study it. The Word of God lines up with this also.

The Time of Christ's Birth

We read in Luke 2:1-10: "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David,

which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

"And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. [The only room they had for Him was on the Cross, not in the inn. The Cross is the only place people want Him yet today.] And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."

How do we know that Christ's birth was not on December 25? The Scriptures tell us, "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." Is it not amazing to whom He appeared first? The shepherds, those who were used to seeing lambs, could now see the Lamb of God. The shepherds were abiding in an open field, keeping watch over their flock by night. Though the climate in Palestine is not as severe as it is in parts of this country, the cold of the night from December through mid-February is piercing. It was not the custom for shepherds to watch over their flocks in open fields any later than October.

Another reason that December 25 could not have been the time of Christ's birth was that men and women had to go to be taxed in the city where they were born. They had to go to Bethlehem, and the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about eighty miles. Commentators let us know that the Romans took a census about

every fourteen years. There are even records of the census taken during early Christendom. When they took the census, people had to return to their hometowns. Some had long journeys, and the middle of the winter was not the proper time to carry out business that would require people to travel.

Travel was not the same in the winter as in other months, and the words of Jesus will verify that. Jesus said in Matthew 24:15-20: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:) Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: Neither let him which is in the field return back to take his clothes. And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day."

The Sabbath day was a crowded day, and in the wintertime traveling was not the best. Those were two times when people did not want to travel. In this Scripture Jesus was speaking about the abomination of desolation that was to come upon old Jerusalem. Jesus said, "But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day." Why? That was to be a time when they would have to leave quickly. They could not move around well on the Sabbath day because it was crowded, and travel was restricted in the wintertime.

The Beginning of Christ's Ministry

Although we cannot pinpoint the exact day Jesus was born, we can know the season. We also know that they crucified Jesus in the spring; the Bible will verify that. John 18:39 says, "But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye there-

fore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

Jesus' ministry lasted three and one-half years; so the beginning of His ministry would have been in the fall, and He was crucified in the spring. Luke 3:23 tells us when He was baptized with the Holy Ghost. It reads, "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." According to Numbers, Chapter 4, thirty years old was the normal time for one to enter the ministry. Numbers 4:1-3 tells us: "And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, after their families, by the house of their fathers, From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation."

Again, they crucified Jesus in the spring, at the time of the Passover, and His ministry lasted three and one-half years. The Book of Daniel lets us know that He was cut off in the midst of the seventieth week. According to that, the beginning of His ministry would have been in the fall. Thirty years of age was the recognized age of a minister under the old Law. Since He was thirty years old in the fall, then thirty years before that time was His time of birth.

The fall of the year was also the logical time for the *feast of tabernacles* in Jerusalem. Luke 2:7 tells us there was no room in the inn. Why? It was crowded, and it was time for the *feast of tabernacles*. Those who have commented on the subject tell us that Jerusalem's population went from 120,000 to 2,000,000. Not only was Jerusalem crowded, but so were the surrounding towns. Everything at that time of the year was completely full. Although we cannot pinpoint the day, we have more reason to believe it was in the fall of the year than any other time. I believe the Bible lines up with that time.

Pagan Customs

Where did December 25 come from? It was the birthday of the *sun god*, and it was the shortest day of the year. It was a pagan feast, celebrating light over darkness. It was easily changed from a pagan festival to a Christian custom, because Christ was considered the Light of life. John 1:4 backs that up: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men."

December 25 was a time when they celebrated light over darkness. Later Roman Catholics changed it from worshipping the *sun god* to worshipping the *Son of God*. We can trace this even further back in history. Noah had a great-grandson whose name was Nimrod, and he was a very evil man. He married his own mother. Nimrod's mother was known as the "Babylonian Queen of Heaven," and Nimrod became the son of Baal, the *sun god*. Nimrod was the founder of the old Babylonian kingdom, which was to hold God's people in bondage. When was his birthday? It was on December 25. Roman Catholicism got it from the pagans, and they got it from the Babylonian empire.

What about the Christmas tree? Well, an old Babylonian fable has it that overnight an evergreen tree sprang up from a dead tree stump. The new evergreen tree was a symbol that Nimrod had come to life again in the person of Tammuz. This idea spread and developed, and various nations had their legends about sacred trees. To the Druids, the oak tree was sacred. To the Egyptians, the palm tree was sacred. To the Scandinavians, the fir tree was sacred to their god *Odon*. To the Romans, the fir tree was sacred, and they decorated it with red berries during the *Saturnalia*, the feast of Saturn, the god that was supposed to reign during the *Golden Age*. During this feast, work stopped, they never declared war, they closed the schools, and they gave gifts.

The green tree is associated with

idolatry, heathenism, false worship, and paganism, according to Jeremiah. We read in Jeremiah 10:1-6: "Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax.

"They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good. Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might." The very principle of these Scriptures fits right in with the season that we have before us. The Lord said to learn not the way of the heathen.

First Kings 14:22-24 reads: "And Judah did evil in the sight of the LORD, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins which they had committed, above all that their fathers had done. For they also built them high places, and images, and groves, on every high hill, and under every green tree. And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD cast out before the children of Israel."

The Bible tells us that the customs of the people are vain. They cut a tree out of the forest, deck it with silver and gold, fasten it with nails and with hammers so that it does not move. We used to go out and try to find the perfect tree, a tree that had the branches positioned just right; then we complained and grumbled when we tried to make it stand upright. Someone may say, "We are not getting so carried away that we feel there is anything about that tree

that reminds us of Christ."

I want you to read a song entitled "O Christmas Tree." This song is in a new hymnal from the First Church of God of Anderson, Indiana.

*O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
Your branches are lifted.
You seem to say that on this day
Our world supremely gifted.*

*The shining of your candles bright
Reminds us light has come tonight.
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
You lift our eyes to heaven.*

*O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
You shine like stars above us.
And with your beauty silent say
How greatly God must love us.*

*You show us Him who with God's face
Brought to our hearts the gift of grace.
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
You lift our eyes to heaven.*

*O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
In plainness you were growing.
Until we came and brought you here
And set your branches glowing.*

*Your living beauty helps us see
How clothed with Christ our lives
can be.*

*O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree,
You lift our eyes to heaven.*

You talk about something being heathenish and paganish! What does the Scripture say? "Forasmuch as there is none like unto thee, O LORD; thou art great, and thy name is great in might" (Jeremiah 10:6). Nothing you can get can remind you of Jesus Christ. Nothing can be placed alongside Christ. Some say, "The Christmas tree is evergreen, so it shows life." Look at them out in the alleys right after Christmas. The branches are dead. Exodus 20:4 reads, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."

Holiday Traditions

What about all the Christmas lights? Where did they originate? The pagans used lights and open fires, and they placed great emphasis on them. They thought they warmed the sun and drove away evil spirits. Pagans used and gave candles as gifts during the *Saturnalia*.

I thought about the Christmas lights that we see as we drive around town, and yes, they are pretty; but do you know what is behind much of it? It is pride. People try to outdo one another.

The custom of using the mistletoe at Christmastime also comes from ancient pagan traditions and ceremonies. The mistletoe was supposed to have miraculous healing power in it. The custom of kissing under the mistletoe came out of a lustful spirit in an old pagan feast of ungodliness and reveling, and that is the same spirit behind it yet today. This custom is a legalized way to release an old, lustful passion within the hearts of unsaved people. Yet it is all done in observance of Christ's birthday.

You could not have Christmas without Santa. People place much emphasis on Santa Claus. He visits more shopping centers and department stores than Jesus Christ does. Santa Claus, or jolly old Saint Nick, is the world's greatest gift giver, in place of Jesus Christ. Second Corinthians 9:15 says, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." Parents tell children, "You had better be good or Santa will not bring you anything. You had better not cry, and you had better not pout." It is a lie to propagate that to your children. You discipline your child for lying, and then you tell them a big lie when you tell them there is a Santa Claus. I was caught up in that when I did not know the truth. On Christmas Eve I would set out cookies and a glass of milk. After the children went to bed, I would slip out of bed and have a feast of cookies and milk. The next morning the

children would say, "Oh, Santa was here during the night," and we would say, "Surely he was; there is evidence of it. Look at that." Telling children that is a lie. Adults sometimes get more carried away with it than the children do. When the children grow up and learn the truth, then they may also wonder if you are telling them the truth about Jesus.

Gift Giving

Where did jolly, old Saint Nick come from? Saint Nicholas was Bishop of Myra, honored by the Greeks and Latins on December 6. He secretly bestowed gifts upon three daughters of a needy person. This Catholic observance was eventually brought into the church and connected with Christmas. Santa's coming down the chimney starts from an old Norse belief. A goddess called *Heartha* supposedly appeared in a fireplace and brought good luck to the home.

At Christmastime everyone has to receive a gift, except Jesus; they leave Him out. What gift does Jesus want? Romans 12:1 tells us, "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."

The custom of exchanging gifts at this time of year has its roots back in old pagan festivals. It is a product of heathenism. This season, I am sorry to say, many are going to go deeply in debt. The merchants make it easy for people to go into debt by promising deferred payment options, such as no payments till March. All people have to do is sign their name on the dotted line. Many people get into bondage financially at this time of year. People spend money out of obligation. Often there is no love behind it at all. Someone is going to give them a gift, so they have to give one to that person, while loan companies get rich.

The wise men brought gifts for Christ; however; it was a custom when approaching a king to bring

gifts. The queen of Sheba brought gifts when she came before King Solomon. Second Chronicles 9:9 states, "And she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices great abundance, and precious stones: neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave king Solomon." They still practice this custom in the East. People never approach the presence of kings, great rulers, or magistrates without gifts.

Now, think just for a minute. If it is Jesus' birthday, why do people purchase gifts for everyone else? It does not make sense. If someone in your family has a birthday, for whom do you purchase the gifts? The person who has the birthday!

A Moneymaker for Merchants

Merchants have elevated prices at this time of year. Oh, the merchants advertise lots of sales, but often they mark up the prices so they can mark them down. Why? They know that people will buy in desperation, especially when they get to the last few days before Christmas and they have not purchased their presents yet. Some people go wild and say, "I don't care what the price is. You only have one left? I'll take it." The prices have been elevated at least 25 percent. The day after Christmas, watch those sales. Before Christmas, you might have bought a game that cost \$15, but it may be only \$5.98 the day after Christmas. Perhaps you bought a bicycle (of course, a child cannot ride it in the winter-time) for \$79, but after Christmas it will be priced at only \$59. People get sick about how much money they have spent after Christmas, but they are in bondage; they have to do it. Why? If they do not do it, others look upon them as old Scrooges.

This is the time of the year when I get more calls than any other time. What happens? People take the money they need for the utilities and the rent to buy Christ-

mas trees, presents, booze, and food for parties; then they call the preacher and say, "Can you help me?" Of course, they do not tell you that they spent their money on Christmas. They simply say, "My rent is due."

Christmas is also the time of year when the work of God suffers. Every year the offerings go down and the missions suffer. Why? People get head over heels in debt. They forget the needs on the mission fields, and they forget the brother who is out of work. Some get so caught up in the spirit of Christmas that they cannot settle down to serve God. They even get so far in debt that they use their tithes, but it is not even theirs to use; it is the Lord's. That is where they really get into trouble.

Christmastime is a money-maker for the merchants, and the season gets longer every year. The day after Thanksgiving is the biggest shopping day of the year. The largest group of people who make money celebrating Christ's birthday are the Jews, a people who do not even believe He is the Messiah. Though they do not believe in Christ, how they laugh and turn up the Christmas music when people walk into their department stores. Friend, most of the people in this world reject Christ.

Standing in the Right Way

Now, do not read this message and then go out and tell people, "Brother Decker says you cannot partake of Christmas" or say "Whoever participates in Christmas is a heathen and is not saved." The message is to tell you where the custom of Christmas came from. Christians partake of many customs, but when a custom is based upon lies, that stirs me as a pastor. People try to hook Jesus up with something that He is a million miles away from.

Many people partake of Christmas out of pure hearts. They do not know the Truth. I have told you the

truth, and I leave the message with you. Christmas, worldly events, and things of the world have a greater pull on us as Christians if we do not live as close to God as we ought.

Now, you need to use godly wisdom with the message. I told you earlier in the message that strong meat belongs to those who are mature, spiritually speaking. If I were to visit my family at Christmastime, I would not walk in there and preach to them. They know how I stand. I am not going to jump all over them because they have a Christmas tree and exchange gifts. That would not be using wisdom, and doing that would break

off the line of communication with them. The world cannot receive this truth. They need to be saved first. Do not let your good be evil spoken of. You need to stand for the Truth, but stand in the right way. Many today do not know the Truth.

Church of God, you need to make sure that you obey God as He directs you. Again, the message is not sent to put condemnation on you, but to tell you exactly where this holiday came from. Remember, the Bible says that you shall know the Truth and the Truth shall make you free. A bondage comes along with Christmas. Many people feel that they have to participate in gift

exchanges whether they want to do it or not. Some fuss and fight and carry on when they put up a Christmas tree. If their tree starts to fall over, they swear and carry on. That is bondage.

The Church of God should not lay aside this message. If you lay it aside, you will be singing the same song: "O Christmas Tree." That song is as Babylonian as it can be. It does not belong in a Church of God hymnal. Thanks be unto God for *His* unspeakable gift! I am thankful for the Truth; it was the Truth that set me free.

(Cassette C-1833E)

[Guest Editorial—continued from page 2]

(1 Thessalonians 4:17). On that same day "the earth . . . shall be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10). When that day comes, everyone will be taken, not just the saints. Consider Jesus' words in Matthew 24:37-39. In verse 36 Jesus said, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall the coming of the son of man be." Verse 39 says, "And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." Those in the ark had a far different fate than those who were outside the ark, but "the flood came and took them all away." The same water that was death to many raised those in the ark to safety.

Why did both Paul and Peter speak of the Lord's coming "as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10)? Look at how Jesus used the thought of a "thief." In Matthew 24:43 He said, "But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have *watched*, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up." Jesus referred to a thief in the sense that he comes at an unguarded hour.

He preceded this verse with the words of verse 42, which states, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." He

followed verse 43 with the admonition of verse 44, where He said, "Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." We can clearly see that the term "thief" was not referring to illegal activities, but rather He was instructing us to "watch." If you read 1 Thessalonians, Chapters 4 and 5, in continuity, you will see that this is the thought conveyed there. The Apostle Paul said (concerning those who were watching), "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief" (1 Thessalonians 5:4).

Some take the prophecy of Zechariah 14:4, where the Prophet penned, "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives," as an indication that Christ will come again after "the rapture" and stand upon this earth. However, according

to the Scriptures, Christ will never set foot on this earth again. Notice in verse 4 the phrase "in that day." This is a prophetic phrase referring to this Christian dispensation. Acts 1:10-12 lets us know that it was "from the mount called Olivet [or Olives]" that He ascended into Heaven. All the things that the Prophet said would occur in this passage are spiritual realities experienced in this New Testament dispensation.

I trust this clarifies some supposed proof texts concerning this dangerous and damnable false teaching. In the next article we will consider some other verses used by advocates of this persuasion and see what they really teach in the light of Truth.

Brother Earl R. Borders

We are not to add to
the Bible, nor to
subtract from it, but

Joel 2:1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand;

Habakkuk 3:2 O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy.

Isaiah 26:1 In that day shall this song be sung in the land of Judah; We have a strong city; salvation will God appoint for walls and bulwarks.

Zechariah 13:1 In that day there

shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

Zechariah 9:9 Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.

Revelation 3:13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and

true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

16 So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

Do You Need a Spiritual Revival?



Brother Charlie Green

We Have a Strong City

The Prophet Joel stated in our Scripture text in Joel 2:1, "Blow ye the trumpet in Zion." The trumpet is not being blown anywhere else but in Zion. Regardless of how the enemy tries to work on you, the Bible still teaches that there is only one church, and that is the Church

of the Living God, or Mount Zion. Our Scripture text in Habakkuk 3:2 reads, "O LORD, I have heard thy speech, and was afraid: [Dear one, when the Lord speaks to you, you ought to have enough of the fear of God to obey. There is too much loose living. May God help you to be afraid when the Lord speaks.] O LORD, revive thy work in the midst

of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy."

Isaiah 26:1 lets us know that as inhabitants of the city of Zion, we have a strong city in which to dwell. God has appointed salvation for walls and bulwarks. If you dwell in Mount Zion, you dwell in the strong city. Friend, God has all power to

arouse you out of the sleepy condition that is creeping in upon you. It is knocking on your heart's door, trying to get you to become insensitive to the things that make the city of God a strong city.

The Church of God is high and lifted up and beautiful. She is still the only one of her mother. God is still in control of the church. If you will let Him be in control of your life, you must crucify the flesh.

Our Scripture text says in Zechariah 13:1, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness." The Father gave Jesus all power, and that same power is given to each inhabitant of this strong city. Therefore, there is no reason for anyone to compromise or go into apostasy. However, you must resist the temptation and the evils of this world.

Our Scripture text states in Zechariah 9:9, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem [he did not say to sit in your seat and be quiet]: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." In Matthew 21:1-9 we can read of the fulfillment of this prophecy in Zechariah. We can see the fulfillment of Jesus' coming. You can be assured that if you will stay in strict obedience to God's eternal Word, you will have the power to overcome and be victorious in a courageous manner, without defeat, without failure, without backsliding. Friend, you *can* be victorious!

"Consider Your Ways"

Men of God in every age have had to deal with the spirit of lukewarmness, coldness, and indifference. These spirits come on people because they do not resist the flesh, the desires and passions of the flesh. Do you need a spiritual revival?

Habakkuk wrote in Habakkuk 1:2-5: "O LORD, how long shall I cry,

and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth. Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you."

It seemed to Habakkuk that there was such an injustice by God, but if you really read it closely, it was the mercy of God being extended to those who worked iniquity. The Prophet Haggai wrote in Haggai 1:2-7: "Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD'S house should be built. Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways."

In Revelation, Chapter 3, you can read of a people who once lived for God, but they allowed things to come in and rob them of their peace and joy. There is nothing any worse than for a child of God to lose the peace and joy he once had in serving God. We read in Revelation 3:13-17: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold

nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."

The Book of Revelation tells us that John was given a reed like unto a rod to measure the temple of God. May God help each of us, preachers and laity, not to be insensitive to the Word of God as it goes forth. If the preached Word shows you a need of your heart and life, you need to be sensitive enough to acknowledge it, and then be willing to measure up and straighten up. The devil does not want the Word to go forth, but we can defeat the devil by the power of God.

Wickedness and Corruption

We found in the Book of Habakkuk that the Prophet was very disturbed concerning the people of his day. If there was ever a day and time that God's people needed to be concerned about conditions, it is today. Before Nehemiah could rebuild the wall around Jerusalem, first he had to get all the garbage and trash cleaned up. You cannot build over rubbish. Friend, you cannot build on division. You might as well take down your sign and throw it away. The Prophet Habakkuk was concerned about the wickedness and the corruption that surrounded him.

I can remember the late Brother E. A. Wilson preaching years ago concerning the condition of our country. Not only are the people outside the church going to suffer, but God's people are going to suffer under the same thing the world is suffering. Brother, sister, it is time for you to ask God, "Do I need a spiritual quickening in my life today?" If you do not get as close to God as you can and get every hindrance out of the way, you could

end up as one of those people that the Prophet Habakkuk was talking about.

Many have fallen under compromise and lukewarmness. None of us is immune from these things, and that is the reason God is trying to stir your never-dying soul. God wants you to take hold of hope and faith in Him and let Him restore that portion of your experience that needs restoration. Corruption is everywhere, in neighborhoods and in the business world. There is very little in our world today that does not have corruption behind almost every deal, from the politicians all the way down the line. Many men do not have any scruples anymore. In business dealings many people take advantage of others. They do not care how much money it costs the buyer, just so they can sell their goods.

The Prophet Habakkuk was grieved over all the wrongdoing in his day. Wrongdoing still grieves the hearts of God's men and God's people. There should not be wrongdoing among those who claim to be God's people. That is the worst kind of corruption. True saints of God do not try to destroy one another's character. This is an area of life about which we each need to be very sensitive. I have no axes to grind, so to speak, and I do not have anyone in mind. I am preaching what God laid on my heart. It is high time that God's people get back to the very basics and fundamentals of God's eternal Word. Do you need a spiritual quickening?

"O LORD, Revive Thy Work"

You can see the same condition in the Book of Isaiah. Chapter 1 parallels our day and time, so we need not think it strange if wickedness is allowed to prevail and seems to prosper long to those who serve it. Do not forget that the wheels of God grind slow, but they grind mighty fine. Everyone is going to reap what he or she has sown. The wages of sin is death. Sin takes men

and women further than they want to go, and it will surely cost them a price that they are not willing to pay in the end.

Again, Habakkuk 1:2-3 says: "O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! . . . for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention." Christian friend, how long did someone cry out to God for mercy on your soul? Yet someone kept travailing and crying out to God. Finally, as Christ kept knocking on your heart's door, you opened the door and allowed Him to come in.

First Thessalonians 5:17 instructs, "Pray without ceasing." Galatians 6:9 admonishes, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." Dear one, you need to continue to pray and not grow weary in the office of prayer.

The Prophet Habakkuk cried out in Habakkuk 3:2, "O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." The key word in this verse is "revive." The Hebrew word for *revive* is **halyah**, which means, "to revive, keep, leave, or make alive, preserve, quicken, recover, repair, or restore." A great revival is needed today, not only in the church world but also among those who claim to be God's people. People need to have their spiritual conditions restored to where they are sensitive concerning their brothers and sisters in Christ. Spiritual restoration will bring all the attributes and characteristics of the Spirit of God. If those who claim to be God's people truly had the revival that God wants in their hearts and lives, there would not be little groups here and little groups there.

Becoming Insensitive

Jesus said in Matthew 18:6, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were

better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea." That is Jesus' judgment. Many have been offended because of the insensitivity of others, whether it is intentional or unintentional. We all need to be careful about this. It is easy to let the flesh take over and just let the tongue rattle; that is not of the Spirit. The flesh can get you in much trouble by your insensitivity to other people's feelings.

For anything to be revived, one must realize that he has lost something. Slowly but surely, the foundations are crumbling out from under people's experiences, but it is difficult to get people to acknowledge that they have lost something. Many really do not have the sensitivity they once had.

God's people are concerned about God's work being done. The people of God are concerned about the conditions of our day. God's true ministry are concerned about the prevailing conditions of our day that are trying to sweep in. Unclean spirits are ever working to try to influence every child of God. The only way that you can avoid the influences of these wrong spirits is by keeping the Spirit of God within your heart and life. Child of God, you must resist the influences of these unclean spirits that are sweeping our land.

Some who were once spiritual vessels used by God are out in Babylon. Now they wear immodest apparel and go to the movie houses. What has happened to them? They did not allow a spiritual quickening to take place when the Word of God came to them from the pulpit. They allowed a lukewarm condition to sweep into their never-dying souls, and they were swept away into the sea of lukewarmness, coldness, indifference, and deadness. If there is any message that we all need to hear and heed, it is the message concerning lukewarmness, coldness, and indifference. None of us is immune from these spirits.

The people in Laodicea, in

Revelation, Chapter 3, became so insensitive that they were deaf to the beckoning call of the Spirit of God through the form of Jesus Christ. They said they had need of nothing, yet they were as lost as they could be. They had allowed themselves to become insensitive and indifferent to the Christ of Calvary. You see, if you turned down the message, you are not rejecting the preacher. When a preacher is anointed and preaching what "thus saith the Lord" and you reject the message, you are rejecting Christ. The people of Laodicea rejected the beckoning call of Jesus Christ because they were insensitive.

The Laodicean church parallels our day and time. Those people were rich and increased with goods. Materially speaking, they were wealthy. They had houses and lands, and no doubt their barns were filled, but those things had caused them to become insensitive to the wooing of Jesus Christ.

Today many people are in the same condition, and they need a spiritual revival. Friend, if you are guilty, God wants you to take the message and let Him bring a spiritual quickening within your heart. If you know that you have a need, yet you have rejected the Spirit of Christ time after time, then you have become insensitive. You have allowed your heart to become hardened. God wants you to break up the fallow ground. Let Him stir you, motivate you, and bring you back into the bond of perfectness.

"Hear What the Spirit Saith"

The initial work of salvation is the work that God wants to see revived in our day and time. We see many things going on in the religious world. We see all kinds of moves being made, but God wants to see a revival of holiness brought back. Habakkuk was concerned, just as every true man of God is concerned about conditions that exist today. Despite all the conditions around us, the Church of God

is still beautiful. She is still holy and without spot or blemish. Nothing within the church is unclean. She is just as pure, clean, holy, and sweet as she was on the day she was instituted by the blood of Christ.

Every child of God makes up the body of Christ. If you have a spot or a blemish on your wedding garment, then you are on the outside. A spot or a blemish is a sin, a wrongdoing, or any act of disobedience that puts a spot on your wedding garment. That sets you outside the gate of the city of God. God wants to see restoration concerning your sensitivity, in the way you act and in way you talk.

One way the devil works today is to cause you to lose confidence in this brother or that brother. You need to guard your mind, or you will put a spot on your garment. God wants to warn you along the lines of being sensitive toward others. Psalm 133:1 reads, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" It is one thing to sing it and to say it, but it is another thing to practice it. God wants to see that restored in a great manner today. The old spirit of insensitivity will cause a husband and a wife to break fellowship. Any act or word of insensitivity between people can automatically start a little rift, or drifting apart.

Christian friend, do not be as the Laodicean people were. They had a spirit about them that would not acknowledge that they had need of anything. God knows what you need. Again, Habakkuk 1:2 says, O LORD, how long shall I cry, and

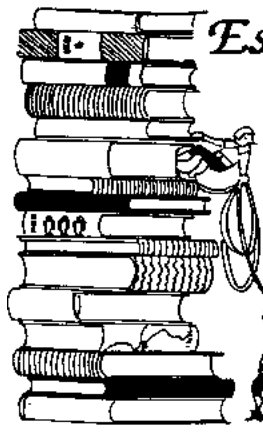
"thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!" In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, "I stand at the door, and knock." He is waiting for not only the unregenerated man to open the door but also for the professing Christian to acknowledge his need before Him and to ask Him to supply that need.

Second Chronicles 7:14 says, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." No healing can be done without seeking God and acknowledging your need.

"O LORD . . . in wrath remember mercy" (Habakkuk 3:2). I believe that is what God wants to do. Even in wrath, He wants to extend His mercy. Joel 2:12-13 says: "Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; And rend your heart." Is there any part of your spiritual experience that needs restoration? If so, I beg of you to get that need taken care of. Before you can receive any help, you have to acknowledge that you have a need. Jesus stood at the door of the Laodicean church and knocked. In Revelation 3:22 Jesus said, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith." As the Spirit of God knocks at your heart's door, won't you obey Him?

(Cassette C-2571A)

No man can live wrong
and pray right.
No man can pray right
and live wrong.



Especially for Young People

A Story From the American Civil War



The most interesting story I ever heard was told me years ago by a man more than eighty years of age. We were sitting together on a projecting rock of a mountainside in Arkansas, and he told me this story:

"I was down in this country during the Civil War. Across on the other side yonder there were hundreds of tents where our soldiers were encamped. Measles broke out, and many of our brave lads died. The epidemic became so bad that we stretched some tents farther down the valley and moved all the measles patients into those tents. This, of course, was done to protect as far as possible the health of the well soldiers. I was the ward master in charge of tents where the measles patients were located.

"One night while I was on the ward, I passed a bunk where there was a very sick soldier lad not more than seventeen years of age. The boy looked at me with a pathetic expression and said, 'Ward master, I believe I am going to die. I am not a Christian. My mother is not a Christian. My father is not a Christian. I never had any Christian training. I never did attend church.

"I did go with a friend to Sunday school once. A woman taught the Sunday school class. She seemed to be such a good woman. She read us something out of the Bible about a man. I think his name was Nicodemus. Anyway, it was about a man who went to see Jesus one night, and Jesus told this man he must be born again. The teacher said all people must be born again in order to go to Heaven when they die. I have never been born again, and I don't want to die like this. Won't you please get the chaplain so he can tell me how to be born again?"

The old man hesitated for a moment. "You know, in those days I was an agnos-

tic—at least, that is what I called myself. As a matter of fact, I wasn't anything but an old sinner. So I told the boy, 'You don't need a chaplain. Just be quiet now. Don't worry. You'll be all right.' I went on around the ward, and in about an hour I came back to the boy's bed.

"He looked at me out of such sad staring eyes as he said, 'Ward master, if you won't get me the chaplain, please get me the doctor. I am choking to death.' I said, 'All right, my son, I'll get you the doctor.' So I went off and found the doctor. He came and mopped out the throat of the lad so he could breathe just a little easier. I knew the boy was going to die. I had seen many other cases just like his.

"The boy was so sweet he literally climbed into my heart. He thanked me for being so good to him. The doctor and I went away from the bed. In about an hour I came back expecting to find the boy dead, but he was still struggling. He looked up out of his eyes of death and said, 'There is no use, Ward master. I have to die, and I haven't been born again. Whether you believe in it or not, won't you find the chaplain and let him tell me how to be born again?'

"I looked at him for a moment and thought about how helpless he was in the grip of death. So I said, 'All right, my son, I will get you the chaplain.' I walked away a few paces and then turned and went back to the boy's bedside. I said, 'My boy, I am not going to get the chaplain. I am going to tell you what to do myself. Now understand, I am an agnostic. I don't know whether there is any God. I don't know whether there is any Heaven. I don't know whether there is any hell. I don't know anything. Yes, I do. I know one thing: I know my mother was a good woman. I know if there is a God, my mother

knew Him. If there is a Heaven, I know she is there.

"So I will tell you what my mother told me. You can try it and see if it works. Now, I am going to teach you a verse of Scripture.

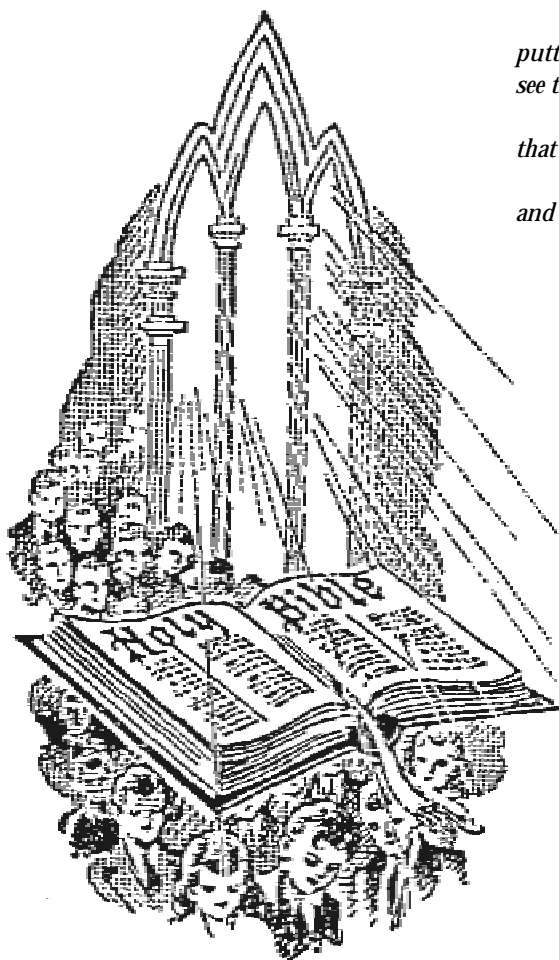
"The verse is John 3:16. It says, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.' My mother said that I cannot save myself, but if I will believe in Jesus, He will save me.'

"I asked the boy to say the verse with me. I started, and he followed with a weak, shaky voice slowly: 'For God so loved the world...'

"I referred the lad to another verse my mother taught me, but he closed his eyes, stretched his hands across his breast, and in a whisper he quoted slowly, repeating some of the words several times, 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him—BELIEVETH IN HIM.' Then, he stopped and said with a clear voice, 'Praise God, Ward master, it works. I believe in Him! I shall not perish! I have everlasting life! I have been born again! Ward master, your mother was right. Why don't you try it? Do what your mother said. It works, Ward master. This thing works! Ward master, before I go, I want to ask you to do something for me. Tell my mother what you told me, and tell her that her dying son said, "It works." Then, as he drew his last breath, he said, "It works."

The old man, wiping tears out of his eyes and out of the wrinkles of his face, said, "The lad was right. It does work. Whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish but has now everlasting life. It works. I know it works!"

Selected



Luke 8:16 No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light.

17 For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad.

18 Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.

THE GRAVE RESPONSIBILITY THAT IS YOURS IN HEARING THE WORD OF GOD

Brother Esau Brooks

Creatures of Choice

In our Scripture text Jesus was introducing very sobering thoughts. It would be serious enough if it had to do with only this life, but it is so much more serious when having to do with the life to come. Earlier in the chapter, He presented the dangers of the various kinds of soils that the Word of God falls upon as the sower sows it. The danger comes in light of the fact that *you* are the one to decide which type of soil represents you when the Word of God is being sown.

Of the wayside soil, the Scripture says, "Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved" (Luke 8:12). There is a danger, friend. You need to seal it that you are not going to be as the wayside soil and allow Satan to come along and remove the Word from

your heart and cause you to come short of believing and being saved.

Not too many have been fully awakened as yet to the seriousness of not being saved. Many people have developed the mentality that being a sinner is not too bad. Some have even gone as far as to feel that being a sinner is what they were supposed to be. No, friend. As a sinner, you are as much out of your place as a fish would be up in the top of a tree or as a bird would be down in the depths of the sea. You were not made to be a sinner.

You may ask, "If God didn't want me to be a sinner, why did He make sin?" God did not make sin; that is the work of the devil. Why is sin abounding in such magnitude and greatness? God made each of us creatures of choice. Making us creatures of choice would make no sense at all if He were not going to afford us something to choose. God's way of giving us the opportunity to make

the right choice is to give us two choices.

I have heard people say, "You can't live a saved life in the midst of all this wickedness." It is just this simple: If God can keep the fish of the sea in salt water all the days of its life, and when you take it out, you have to put salt on it to enjoy eating it, then He can keep you from sin in the midst of all the wickedness. The same power that keeps the salt out of the fish is the same power that can keep sin out of you. It is just that the devil has clouded people's vision and complicated matters of their understanding to the extent that they fail to come to the knowledge of the truth along these lines.

Standing Through the Hard Places

When I was quite a young boy, I did not go to church to get saved. I was more concerned about living in

sin than living for God. I had been brought up going to Sunday school and church, and I had been brought up staying off the streets. Oftentimes before the sun set, I was in bed. I could hear the rest of the neighbor's children outside playing, and I used to say to myself, "I really hope that I can soon grow up so I can get out of this and do what others are doing."

Not long after I got out of school, I decided that I was going to experience all there was to experience in sin. I had already climbed up on the "springboard," so to speak, and was ready to take my plunge into wickedness when God took hold of me, as it were, and pulled me back. He told me, "I have better things for you than that." I am so glad He did. Of the few little pleasures that I enjoyed in sin (I thought I was really living), after Jesus found me, I looked back at them and said, "They are nothing to compare."

I want you to know that the devil has deceived the masses along the line of what salvation is. When I got saved, it was so good. I remember when the Lord took the burden of sin from my heart. I had to keep looking down to see if I was still touching the ground! It was as if I was floating around in the air. I am not saying this for you to go out and look for the same experience to happen to you. I just want you to do what God says and get what God has for you. I am just telling you how it happened to me. You may ask, "Well, do I have to get it that way?" No, I want you to get it in a greater way.

I was enjoying serving God until one morning when I got up all enthused and stepped out the front door of the house, a certain sister turned loose on me and said everything she could think of that she knew would hurt me to the core. Up to that time, I was not used to that. I felt, "If you could beat me, beat me, but you are not going to bluff me."

As she stood before me, I could feel my hand coming up. Why was it coming up? I was ready to flatten her out; that was the best I knew to do then. However, I could not get my

hand up, as it were. She was there just laying it on me, and then I started to cry. I was not crying because of what she was saying. I was crying because I could not do to her what I wanted. So I wandered off from there and kept walking until I came to a hill, and I fell on my knees and said, "Lord, You are going to have to do something for me. I can't take this."

When I first got saved, I did not know what all was going to be involved in serving God. I did not know there would be hard places to go through, but bless God, as I began to experience them, my roots began to go down deep. It has enabled me to last, and I am still letting my roots go down yet today. The Scripture says it is through much tribulation that we enter the Kingdom of God.

Many people are floundering on the surface and playing around the edges because they say they do not want to invite any trouble. Friend, if you are going to serve God, you are already in trouble. The devil is going to see to that. If you live for God, you are in trouble with the devil. On the other hand, if you live for the devil, you are in trouble with God. As far as I am concerned, I will take the trouble with the devil and live for God.

Are You Halting Between Two Opinions?

Next, Jesus spoke of what we call the rocky soil. He said, "They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation [or testing] fall away" (Luke 8:13). It is one thing to receive something, but it is quite another thing to keep what you have received. Many people go to church and enjoy the message and even thank God for the message, but they fail to keep it. Some lose it before they even get out the front door. Those whom Jesus likened to rocky soil receive the Word with joy, but they have no root; so when temptations come, they fall away. They only last for a short time because they do

not let their roots go down.

Many people are in the valley of decision, halting between two opinions: "Should I or should I not? I would like to serve God, but I don't want to turn back." The devil brought that idea across my path very early after I started to live for God. A friend of mine said, "If you bother with that thing, you are going to end up worse than you were before you started."

I said, "Well, I will never know if I don't get started." So I started. Many years have gone by since then, and much water has gone under the bridge, so to speak, but praise the Lord, I am still going on! And I still mean to go right on!

My friend, if you are halting between two opinions and have the jitters because you know you ought to live right and stand up to whatever problem you have in your life, but you are afraid of the devil, you do not have to be. God's grace is sufficient to keep you. Young person, should you invest your life in the service of the Lord, you will soon find that it will be the best investment that you could ever make with your life. Nothing else in this life pays as serving God does.

Jesus went on and said that some are as the thorny ground. They hear the Word go forth, but they are choked with the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of this life; therefore, they bring no fruit to perfection. There are people who are losing their souls because they feel, "I would like to stick a little longer on this job. I won't be able to serve God because, well, I would like to have some money laid up." The pleasures of this life are keeping many people from coming to the Lord. Think back on the many times you have stayed away from the church services. Perhaps you did not want to hear the preaching because you were afraid that you would get convicted and get saved, so the easiest thing for you to do was to stay away. Friend, that is not good. Why is it not good? Because this is something that you have to face eventually. Sooner or later,

you are going to decide for or against this. The quicker you decide on it, the better it is going to be for you.

Harden Not Your Heart

How glad I am today that God helped me to stay true to Him through the early years of my teens! There was not as much sin in the world back then as there is today. Back in those days, we did not know anything about homosexuality. People used to use the word "sissy" to describe the effeminate. Anytime someone wanted a fight, that is all he had to call a person. Now some people have come to the place where they are fighting people to call them "sissy." That is what the gay rights are all about, fighting to be called "gay," but there is nothing gay about it. Back when I was growing up, if a person said, "I'm gay," it meant he was happy or rejoicing. Today you had better not use that word in the same way. There has been a change, even in vocabulary.

Homosexuality and all kinds of wickedness are flaunting around. If you do not get saved now, it is going to get worse. Do not wait for any better time than right now. I am of the persuasion that wickedness that has never even entered into our minds will soon be commonplace.

Today we are hearing about the threat of the Internet and of how the governments of the world are trying to protect their citizens and their young people from its ungodly influences and are unable to prevail. You cannot imagine how wicked this world is going to get in a very short time. That is the reason I want to impress upon you the urgency of getting saved now. It is no wonder the Bible says, "*Now* is the accepted time; behold, *now* is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2). "Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts . . ." (Hebrews 3:7-8). It is very urgent that you look into this matter of why God wants you to hear these things.

In our Scripture text in verse 16,

Jesus presented the truth in a figure. He stated, "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed." What was He talking about? Earlier in the chapter He was speaking in a parable, telling of heavenly truths through earthly stories. He employed the language of that day to convey to people the Truth of God's Word.

Jesus was not so much interested in a person lighting a literal candle. He was borrowing a comparison. In essence, He was saying, "When I save you, it is not for you to have it covered with all kinds of reasoning, all kinds of doubting, and all kinds of theories as so many people are doing."

The World by Wisdom Knows Not God

Today when people are exposed to the message of God, instead of taking it outrightly as it is given, in most cases they load it up with many different meanings. For instance, they say, "I don't believe it means that." However, if you were to ask them, "Well, what does it mean?" they would say, "Well, to me, I would say . . ." We do not need all of that. Let us take the Word as it is. In the parable the Word of God is the seed, and the different types of ground upon which the seed falls represent individuals. The purpose of the message is to enlighten you concerning the things of God. You cannot get educated into the things of God. You could go to every college and every university in the world, including Oxford, and end up as much in the dark as you are now concerning the things of God, because it is not found there; it comes by divine revelation.

You cannot hear this message from the learned men of the day, such as the doctors and the reverends. As far as they are concerned, it is foolishness. Paul had to contend with that, as he stated in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24: "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are

called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God." It is still that way.

Verse 21 tells us that the world by wisdom knew not God. The world by wisdom will never discover God. That is what is giving rise to all the splinters that are coming about in the religious world. People are pitting their puny understanding against the wisdom of God. You cannot define the things of God. It is just as if you were to try to define what an orange tastes like. You could tell someone that it is sweet, but that is as far as you can go. The things of God defy human definition. It takes God, and only God, to open one's understanding concerning what it is all about. David said, "The entrance of thy words giveth light" (Psalm 119:130).

Jesus was saying that the sowing of the seed is as one who would light a candle in his house. Surely it is not to be covered with a vessel or put under a bed, but rather it should be set on a candlestick. That was the best they had back then. Today we have electric lights, and we put them in the most useful places where they can serve their purpose.

The Mystery of Living

We can transfer that to the spiritual. It is only after an individual has experienced the miracle-working power of God's grace in his life that he begins to understand the mystery of living; then he wants to show others that there is a better way to live. Living for God is far better than living in sin, even just from the standpoint of the consequences. There are consequences for living in sin, and there are consequences for living for God. Which is better? Living for God is *far* better.

Many more people would have been saved now had ones let the light shine through; but it has been covered, and Satan has gone to work in manufacturing so much false religion. Someone may inquire, "I have heard people speak of false religion. What is false religion?" It is any religion that fails to do for you what

religion was intended to do; it is vain, and it is false. If you have joined a church, how much have you gotten out of joining? How much peace has it given you? How much real joy has it given you? How many sins has it kept you from? Perhaps you merely shook the preacher's hand or wrote your name on the dotted line. You may say, "Well, I kind of felt better." Okay, you felt better, and what? You may say, "That's it!" Dear one, you need more than feeling in this. Sin is not a feeling. Sin is a real condition, and the Bible tells us that "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). "And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:15).

You have to go beyond feelings. You might join a church and feel good, but you need to be made good. That is the reason when Jesus and Nicodemus had their encounter, Jesus said to him, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). You have to go through a process similar to the one you went through when you came into physical being. You had to be born. Likewise, to become a Christian, you have to be born. Nicodemus got a little confused about where this birth takes place. In essence, he asked Jesus, "Should I go through the natural process and then come back the second time as a Christian?" Jesus said, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). You see, it is a process that takes a combination of the preaching of the Gospel and the working of the Holy Spirit to make you a Christian. Going to church will never make you a Christian any more than going into a garage will make you a car. It is no wonder our world is getting so wicked today. Lots of church members are going to church but finding nothing in return.

Take Heed How You Hear

Jesus lets you know that the purpose of the Gospel being given is to bring you spiritual enlightenment to help you to see the need of getting

your life on a higher level so that others can see the difference between the former life of sin and the present life in Christ. There is a difference! Paul stated it this way in his writing to the Church of God at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." You may ask, "Do you really believe that is possible?" I *know* it is.

After exhorting people along the line of the different conditions with which they were being exposed, Jesus went on to state the responsibility that was theirs in hearing the Word of God. He made it plain that if proper attention is not given to the Word of God, you stand to lose even the little that you have. Verse 18 of our Scripture text reads, "Take heed therefore how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given. . . ." God started us all out with something. You have a conscience that tells you when you are wrong and that you need to be made right. That is one reason why many people do not come around Church of God services. Some have even said, "I don't like that preacher to tell me those things." Well, it is not so much the preacher telling them those things; it is God's way of communicating to their needs.

Verse 18 of our Scripture text continues, ". . . and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have." If you keep on rejecting your salvation, you stand to lose rather than to gain. God has blessed you with certain attributes or certain preconditions, and if you would just go by it, it is enough to save you.

I will tell you of an experience that I had before I became a Christian. I had gotten away from home, and I was out on a job. I was going to a dance on Sunday evening. At that time, that was something completely outrageous. I knew I should not have been doing it. On my way to the dance, I had to pass by a church building. When I got abreast of that church building, they were singing

one song that we used to sing as children in Sunday school. The moment I heard those words, something struck me: "Look at yourself. Shame on you to be on your way to a dance on the Lord's night when you should be in church!"

I got so condemned, not from the word of preaching, but from the words of that song. That thing so condemned me that I had to look around to get beside a light pole and lean, because I felt as if I was going to fall down. If that had been the right church and they had given an altar call that night, I would have gone to an altar. But I stood there, and as it were, I wore out the song. When the song was finished and I got over that feeling, away I went to the dance. What was it that made me feel that way? It was conviction. God was working on my heart. Why did I react the way I did? There was something about me that actually responded to the work of the Spirit of conviction, and I was ready to yield.

Are Cares of Life Holding You Back?

Have you ever sat under a God-anointed message and felt shivers go down your spine, so you began to take hold of your seat? That was God dealing with you. Perhaps you went out and said, "I was in an awful shape. I felt terrible!" That was God dealing with you. Nowadays many people can come and listen to the preaching, and instead of having any feelings of that nature, they laugh at it, joke about it, and ignore it. If you have done that, the little that you had, you have lost. It is just as the medical profession says: "What you don't use, you lose." If you do not give the proper attention to the Word of God, you stand to lose. When God sends His Word, it is with a purpose, and that is not for your physical enjoyment or your physical accommodation, but it is to bring forth fruits in your life unto God.

Many things stand ready to get in your way to hinder you from coming to Christ. For example, while

sitting in a church service and the preacher is preaching, you may get an urge to get up and go out or you may get an urge to play with the baby or you may even get an urge to get into a conversation. These are all means that Satan uses to deceive your soul and to send you on your way to hell. You may say, "Well, I wasn't even convicted." If that is the case, you have been slowly drifting, and after a while if you do not heed, you are going to go over the precipice and be destroyed.

Note that Jesus likened hearing the Word to the lighting of a candle. The purpose of lighting a candle is for it to give light so that others can see. If you fail here, you fail completely. That is the responsibility that comes upon your shoulders. There is a responsibility that goes with hearing the Word of God. You need to make sure that you avoid all the conditions that will doom your soul. You have to keep the Word against the rocky condition and the thorny condition. In other words, you must keep the Word against the devil. Then you need to make sure that you do not relegate the matter of your soul to the back burner of your life. Many people put having a career, getting married, and many other things before serving God. However, when the time comes to die, then they will see how foolish they have been.

There is nothing the devil fights more than the preaching of the Word of God, and he is not one to give up easily. His motive is to keep souls out of Heaven. Realizing that he has but a very short time, he is working overtime today.

Many people like to seek out bargains, but when they get home, often they discover that it was not such a bargain after all. The reason is that you get what you pay for. Religiously speaking, it is just the same way. The devil is a church-going devil. Back in the days of the Apostles, he fought the church with throwing the saints to wild beasts, tying them to stakes and burning them, running them through with a

sword, and so on. Today he has changed his methods a little. He is coming to people as an angel of light, and he has such a way of putting religious things that, if it were not for the grace of Almighty God, he would deceive the very elect. That is the reason Jesus warned us, "And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares" (Luke 21:34).

Give the More Earnest Heed

Dear one, the time is coming when you will either rejoice over the time that you have spent in this life or regret it. How sad it would be to appear before the judgment bar of God and know that you have been warned, yet you carelessly disregarded it! Friend, you do not know how soon it could be too late. You do not know when God will call you into eternity. Remember, there are not two or three different ways to be right with God; there is only one way. The quicker you discover that, the better it will be for you.

You need to give heed to the Word of God. Paul wrote to the Hebrew church: "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation" (Hebrews 2:1-3).

I thank God for this great salvation. I am glad for it because of what it has done for me, and I am glad for what it can do for you. No matter how controlled your life may be by the powers of the devil, Jesus came to set you free. Perhaps you have taken drugs nearly all the days of your life and have tried in every human way possible to find freedom and deliverance from that habit. Friend, Christ can deliver you.

People are making plans as if

they are going to live here on this earth forever. Some time ago, a very prosperous businessman in his late forties got up one morning as he had done time and time again. He went into the bathroom to take a shower and get ready to go to work. Suddenly his wife heard a thump on the floor. She jumped up and ran into the bathroom, and there he was, lying on the floor. She called an ambulance, and he was taken to the hospital. By the time he got there, he was pronounced dead. He had a massive heart attack.

While holding a revival in a town in Honduras, on the very first night of that revival, the Lord spoke to souls. I walked down from the platform and went in among the audience, and I began to exhort people to give their hearts to God. I stopped before a certain individual and began to talk to that person. She assured me, "I am going to get saved, and I am going to get saved before this meeting closes."

I said, "Why don't you do it tonight?"

"No, I'm not ready for it tonight."

I said, "You may not be here tomorrow."

She said, "I know that, but I-I-I can't do it tonight." So I left her, and the service closed.

The next morning about seven o'clock, the phone rang and someone said, "Do you remember the person you were talking to last night?" I said, "How could I ever forget?"

"She is dead."

"Dead?"

"Yes, she left the service, went home, and had a massive heart attack." Before the revival ended, instead of giving her heart to God, we had her funeral. Please, please, do not let that happen to you. The Bible tells us, "He, that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Proverbs 29:1). God bless you.

(Cassette C-3633E)

1 Timothy 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

3 For this is good and acceptable in

the sight of God our Saviour;

4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

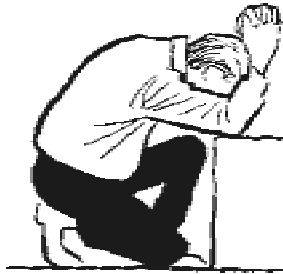
5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

7 Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

THE POWER OF EARNEST PRAYER



Brother E. A. Wilson

Lifting Up Holy Hands

God has promised that He would be all we need. Prayer is one of the greatest needs we have. It is the only thing that will change the situations that we want to see changed and the only thing that will further the work of God. Some of what people call praying today is not real prayer according to the Word of God; so may God help us and give us understanding. I am sure everyone will agree that Paul was a man of prayer. In fact, he came into an experience with God in the midst of spending three days in fasting and praying. He certainly believed in practicing a life of prayer, and he exhorted others to try to get them to feel its needfulness.

Paul said that prayer should be made for all men, and he told us why in verse 4 when he said that God wills all men to be saved. He also said in verse 2 that we need to pray for all those in authority, and certainly much praying needs to be done along this very line in the troublesome time in which we live. There

needs to be much praying for people in other nations as well.

Paul said to pray for kings and leaders in authority, and he gave good reason: ". . . that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life [that would be the prayer of any good citizen; then he got a little stronger than that] in all godliness and honesty"(verse 2).

In verse 8 he said, "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." If you will look into the history of that text, you will find that much of the early church reverted to the Jewish attitude of prayer. When the Jews prayed, they prayed with their hands lifted up and their palms turned toward Heaven.

The Jewish people knew very well the barriers that kept a man's prayers from getting through to God. In fact, Paul was quoting Isaiah 1:15-16, which reads: "And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine

eyes; cease to do evil."

Paul merely brought an Old Testament Scripture into the light of the New Testament. He let them know that if they were going to pray and have God hear them, they would have to lift up holy hands. Holy hands are nothing more than hands that have not touched forbidden things. Lifting up the hands was symbolic of a clean life.

God said in Isaiah 52:11, ". . . be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD." God wants not only your hands to be clean but everything about you. When Paul said "without wrath," he meant with no anger in your heart. The Word of God teaches very plainly that human and divine forgiveness go hand in hand. When you pray, you must also forgive. If you are going to receive forgiveness from God, Jesus taught that you must forgive.

Paul said prayer must be without wrath and without doubting. Also, before you pray and before your prayers can be answered, you must definitely believe that God will answer. You have to come in complete

confidence and believe that God is and that He is a rewarder of every one who diligently seeks Him. Nothing will inspire your faith any more than knowing that your hands are clean, that your heart is pure, and that you have the right attitude toward God and the saints of God.

The Value of Prayer

As I looked at our Scripture text, as well as many other verses, I was prompted to ask the questions: Who can properly estimate the true value of prayer? and Who can appreciate the privilege of prayer? I wonder if we really know its real value and if we really understand and appreciate the privilege of prayer.

Friend, we need to be challenged. I will just make it plain: the way we have been praying is not going to get the job done. We just might as well dismiss the thought that we are fully up to date in our praying and that there is no way we can gain in this area. Too many works have remained undone, and too many have not gotten the victories they ought to have, victories which belong to the Church of God. Prayer is the very foundation and the very reason for every bit of victory.

Many feel it is a great honor to be admitted into the courts of an earthly king, potentate, or president; however, that is nothing beside being able to step into the court of the King of kings, the Potentate of potentates. The devil has done a work on our thinking and our values to the place that most anything else—shopping, running here and there, seeking pleasure, gossiping—is more valuable than prayer. The sad part of it is, God is looking on, and He sees the attitudes we have toward prayer. I doubt if we really know the value of prayer as we should.

The devil is striking a vital area. He knows where our victory lies, and he knows where our overcoming power is; this is the reason he is working on our prayer lives. May God help us. According to the Bible, prayer is the energy and life of the

soul and the mighty weapon with which we fight life's battles. There has never been a victory in any Christian's life but what he prayed and sought God's face; that is God's ordained plan.

In Ephesians 6:10 Paul stated, ". . . be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Then he told us in verse 11 how to do: "Put on the whole armour of God. . . ." Every piece of that armor is to protect you. After you get full protection, then pray much, "with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (verse 18).

I have heard this statement many times: Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees. The devil is not afraid of your singing, your preaching, or your testifying; those things do not bother him. He gets disturbed when he sees you down on your knees getting hold of God in real prayer.

You may ask, "Are you sure prayer is valued so highly?" Why does the devil fight you on your prayer life more than anything else? Why is it so hard to read God's Word and pray? It is because prayer is where our power and our victory really lies. Satan will let you do many other things, but without prayer it will not avail much.

The Power of Prayer and the Results of Prayer

He who really lives the life of prayer reigns triumphant. You cannot have a good prayer life without reigning and being victorious. Some things are possible only through prayer. Through prayer, dark storm clouds are driven away; through prayer, mountains of discouragement are cast into the sea; through prayer, chasms of difficulties are bridged over; through prayer, hope is given wings; through prayer, faith increases; through prayer, joys abound.

There has never been anyone who has gotten hold of God in prayer that has not left the prayer room with joy and praises going forth unto God. It is impossible to pray and get hold of God without the soul being

touched afresh and uplifted by God's presence. There have been many, including myself, who have gone into the prayer closet and had a hard time praying until they really began praying.

How can you know when you are really praying? When you are just saying a prayer, it is hard, it will be very short and limited, and you will be glad when it is over. On the other hand, when you really pray, you do not want to quit when you get God on the line and He begins to say, "Yes, son, I hear you. Go on."

You may go into the prayer closet feeling beat down, because the devil has been giving you such a difficult time, with waves of discouragement rolling over your soul. The devil may even make you wonder if it is really worth living; but once you shut the door and get alone with God and pour your heart out to Him, you will come out ready to fight the good fight of faith no matter what happens. You will be ready to go forth and be victorious for God. By prayer, the windows of Heaven are opened and showers of refreshing dew are rained down upon the soul.

The power of prayer and the results of prayer are manifested in arresting and changing the purposes of God and in changing God's mind. Someone may say, "Oh, some things are going to be just this way." According to the Word of God, you can change God's mind completely through prayer and cause God to repent. I am talking about something mighty powerful when you can cause God to repent by praying.

We are down to the last days. There is much ungodliness and corruption; religion, as a whole, is failing men, and an evening-light apostasy is working all around us. If you are not careful, it will cause you to feel, "I just have to hold out to the end. I pray that I can make it." Prayer changes conditions, and it can change God's mind. If people would really get down to business praying, our nation is not too far gone to have a revival.

Someone may say, "The wheels

of God's judgment are already turning." Over and over, you can read in the Bible where God had decided to pour out His judgment and destroy people, but because someone prayed, God changed His mind and had mercy on them. Oh, the privilege we have of really praying!

The devil hates prayer, but it is the thing that governs our universe. Whether you want to own it or not, every nation is governed by the praying people in that nation. When there are not any praying people, the devil takes over and corruption fills the earth, but praying people can change that.

Prayer Can Affect a Whole Nation

In Genesis, Chapter 20, you can read where Abraham traveled in Gerar. Because His wife was fair to look upon, he was afraid they would kill him; so he told a half lie and said that she was his sister. Abimelech looked upon her and saw that she was a beautiful woman and took her to be his wife. Before the king could go in to her, God gave him a dream and told him that the woman he had taken was another man's wife and that he had better not touch her. God was so stirred that He closed up the wombs of all the people over whom Abimelech was king.

When Abimelech rose in the morning, he went to Abraham and asked, "What have you done to us?" In verse 12 Abraham said, "And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife." Abimelech let him know that he had brought terrible judgment upon them. Not a woman in the country could have a child because God had closed up the wombs of every one of them.

In verses 17-18 we read: "So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maidservants; and they bare children. For the LORD had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech, because of Sarah Abraham's wife." This is a biblical illustra-

tion of how one man's prayers can affect the condition of a whole nation.

God is just as much stirred today as He was back then when you take someone else's wife; He has not changed His mind. Not too many years ago, it was against the law in some states for an individual to live with another man's wife; the police would go in and bring him out. Now the laws and people's feelings toward such things have been so changed that it is commonplace.

Religion has so failed man in laying down the judgments of God that people are made to feel that God does not hate such sin anymore and that it is not as bad as it used to be. God still brings judgment on sin; every transgression receives a just recompense of reward. Mark it down, no one gets by.

In Exodus you can read where Pharaoh was a firm believer in prayer. When God poured out those plagues upon Egypt, every time, Pharaoh called for Moses to entreat the Lord and ask Him to lift the plague. When Moses prayed, the Scriptures say that God lifted the curses. Pharaoh was a wicked and ungodly king, but he believed that the man of God could pray and get hold of God. In Exodus, Chapter 32, when Moses was up on the mountain getting the Law and Aaron led the people to make a golden calf, the Scriptures tell us that the anger of the Lord waxed hot. God said that He would destroy all the people, but Moses fell down before the Lord and prayed for forty days and forty nights. Have you ever prayed for one thing forty days and forty nights? You see, we do not know what real praying is. Forty minutes would be a limit to some people.

Moses got down before God and prayed forty days and forty nights without eating or drinking. I am not saying that you have to pray for the same length of time, but you need to pray as long as it takes to have God hear you. Two or three minutes talking a little and telling God just what you want Him to do is not getting

the job done. I speak with respect to every person; however, we are not sincere enough about prayer. Moses really believed that God was going to do what He said He would do.

Changing the Judgments of God Through Prayer

Let us read Deuteronomy 9:18-20: "And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the LORD was wroth against you to destroy you. But the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also. And the LORD was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time."

When Moses prayed, God had mercy and let the people live for Moses' sake. I want you to see how much God looks on and loves a praying man or woman. God will start saving your children for your sake! The judgments of God might have already passed upon some of them; yet really earnest, sincere prayer in their behalf will change God's mind and make a way for those who perhaps had no hope whatsoever.

God sent Jonah to Nineveh with a message, but he ran from the Lord and went another way. Jonah got on a ship going to Tarshish, and God prepared a great fish to swallow him. When they threw Jonah overboard, the Scripture tells us that Jonah said, "I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice" (Jonah 2:2).

Jonah got down to business with God, and that is what it takes. Do not wait until you are swallowed up in great distress. You need to get down to business with God now and cry unto Him from the depths of your heart, in all honesty and sincerity. God caused the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land, and he quickly went down to Nineveh and said, "Yet forty

days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown"(Jonah 3:4).

There was so much of God in his message that they knew it was God speaking to them, and when they believed God, the king called a fast. Let us read Jonah 3:7-10: "And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands [that was the reason God would not hear them].

"Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not? And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

A whole city of sinners prayed; but I dare say, they out prayed some who claim to be saints, and they moved God! They got down to business and turned from every evil way, cleaned up their lives, and convinced God that they were sincere; so God heard their prayers and repented. I want to say again, prayer has power to cause God to repent; in other words, prayer can cause God to change His mind.

We have more power and more authority through prayer than we realize. If we are not careful, we will fail to use the greatest instrument that God ever gave us, and then we will seek human ways of trying to get things worked out. That is so easy to do.

A Limitless Storehouse Through Faith

Jesus taught us a great lesson concerning talents. One talent that God gives every Christian is the talent of prayer. There has never been a Christian yet who could not pray. This is one of the gifts that God gives

every born-again person. It is your privilege to pray. The talent of prayer is something far beyond what people in the world know anything about.

In the parable of the talents that Jesus told in Matthew, Chapter 25, the man with one talent hid it in the earth and did not use it; therefore he lost it. The law of elimination is, whatever you do not use, you lose. Anything God has given you, if you do not use it as He gave it to be used, you will lose it. We have a high privilege in being able to pray. I cannot begin to tell you the power there is in prayer.

The enemy will work to try to cause you to feel, "What is the use?" When something is very serious, he will try to cause you to give up on God. Friend, it does not have to be that way. In Isaiah 45:7 God said, "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil. . . ."

In Psalm 2:8 God said, "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." There is power in prayer when God can give you the heathen, the unbelieving world. How are you going to get them? "Ask of me," God said.

Oh, what power there is in prayer! The Word of God is full of living, truthful illustrations, but let us join Paul in Hebrews, Chapter 11. This chapter is about praying people. People who have faith are praying people. Paul had been teaching how God is a rewarder of everyone who diligently seeks Him in prayer. He mentioned many patriarchs of faith down through that chapter. In verses 32-33 he said: "And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions."

Too many people think that Daniel just went into the den of lions and God automatically took care of him. No, Daniel's deliverance in the

den of lions was an answer to the prayers that he had prayed three times a day when he bowed and prayed to the God of Heaven, letting Him know, "You are my God. You are my protector. My faith and trust are in You." Daniel's prayer life was up to date! That is the reason he could walk boldly into the circumstance and say, "My God will deliver me."

Verses 34-39 continue: "Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment [we ought to be ashamed to put our trials up beside some of these trials].

"They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise."

May God have mercy on us. They looked forward to the promise. They sealed their lives believing that God's promise was coming and that His promises was true. On the other hand, we have received the promise, and God has taken up His abode: Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is living within every born-again individual, and He has promised never to leave or forsake us. God is reminding us again, "Ask of Me."

Those people faced impossible circumstances, and there was no way out. It was impossible to retain their lives unless they fully placed their faith and trust in God. They knew how to pray, and they knew how to prevail in prayer. Their faith in prayer was no passing attitude that

changed with circumstances or with their own feelings. It was a fact with them that God heard and answered prayer. They threw themselves unre-servedly into the hands of God, be-lieving that He would help them, and He did.

Everything was possible to men and women who knew how to pray. If you will take your time and read Hebrews Chapter 11, you will see that they had God doing just about everything a person could possibly need done. Prayer opened to them a limitless storehouse, and God's hand withheld nothing. Someone may say, "Well, it is not the same with us." Jesus' words were, "What things so-ever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). Although other Scriptures govern that, it is a fact.

Prayer introduced God's people to a world of privilege. It brought the strength and wealth of Heaven down to aid finite man. When Moses prayed, he saved a nation. Have you ever stopped to realize that the Jew-ish nation would have been wiped out right then had Moses not prayed? God was going to kill them all! Ezra prayed and saved the church, yet he was just one man. Certainly, there is more power in agreement of prayer, but there is also power in one man's prayers.

The Danger of Slackness

You must war against that old spirit that will try to settle down on you and cause you to think, "What can I do?" The message is, you can pray. You have the same privilege and right that everyone else has ever had. The same God who changed His mind, saved nations, changed cir-cumstances, and saved lives will hear and answer prayer just the same today if you will get down to busi-ness and pray.

If you will study through the Bible, you will see that people are pretty much the same. It is sad to say, but following every one of those great eras of time when God per-

formed such wonderful works, a slackness in prayer among God's people always followed. It is a pat-tern, and it is something of which you need to beware and battle against. If you get down to business and pray, and God does great things for you, then the next danger is slack-ness in prayer.

Many times we do not hold on as fervently as we did when we prayed and saw the great need filled; be-cause of that, even though we are praying to the same God, we do not see Him move as He once did. You can follow this pattern throughout the Scriptures. In Judges, seven times over, you can read where this same thing happened with Israel. They got down to business with God, and He blessed them and drove out their enemies, and they reigned on high. Next, they gave up, slackened on prayer, and they went down.

All those things happened for our learning and admonition. What is the lesson? If you have been able to get hold of God in a great way, the enemy's next tactic will be to try to cause you to rejoice in the victory and slacken on really praying. If you let down on really praying, he will steal away the victory and the glory that you once enjoyed.

Israel had such a mighty hold on God that so often had struck terror and awe in the hearts of their ene-mies; but when they lost their grip on God, they could not call Him on the scene as they once had. God dwelt in that little box overlaid with gold called the ark. Whenever God saw fit for them to go out and battle against the enemy, they did not have to fight when they carried the ark. Their enemies retreated because they knew they could not fight against God.

Unfortunately, Israel failed God, and His presence left them. They still had the ark of God, but they had lost the God of the ark. After that, they battled with the Philistines and felt that they did not have to worry; however, when they carried the ark out, the Philistines took it away from them.

Friend, you can talk about the Church of God in a formal way being the house of God and having the presence of God. However, if you are not careful, you can lose His presence and hold on to a form and yet be powerless. You must meet God's conditions for Him to stay in the midst. If you fail to meet those condi-tions, you will be left powerless.

Look at the power the morning-time church had: they raised the dead, healed the sick, worked mira-cles of every kind, opened prison doors, and caused earthquakes through their prayers. What hap-pened? They let down and there was a great falling away.

God Renders According to Your Work

Taking a long jump down through the ages, let us also consider the reformation. Men started to get hold of God again. One could say many good things about the reform-ers, but one thing that stands out about every one of them is that they were men of prayer. They spent much time in prayer, and they be-lieved that God would give them the victory. It was God who took them forward in reformation work, right on through the evening-time refor-mation until the Lord brought again Zion, and the truth once again shined brightly in the Church of God.

What has happened to us? When the Lord brought again Zion, it was nothing to see the lame healed and crutches hung up and cancers in bottles. I saw a lame man healed all at once when I prayed for him in a revival. Mighty works were done because God's people were a praying people. It was nothing to see groups of people divided up in different places in the church building praying for an hour before the service.

People think they do not have to do that now; they think they can just turn it on. Well, where is the power? To have the power of God demonstrated in the way every heart desires is going to cost us just the same as it cost people in every other

age of time: spending time seeking God in real prayer.

If you will study Old Testament Israel and read of how God showed Himself so strong, it will thrill you. However, it was not very long until spiritual decay and spiritual death moved in. They had withstood many things through prayer. There was a reason for it. Sad to say, later they no longer were able to get hold of God and pray to withstand famines. Even as people today, they became very busy with other things rather than spending time in prayer.

Study the morning-time apostasy in the New Testament. What was the devil's first work on them? He got them busy with things other than prayer. We are not in a praying age today. There have been praying ages, times when people really prayed and really got hold of God. They spent much time seeking God, and God answered prayer in marvelous ways.

I remember when I was twelve years old, Dad was holding a revival meeting in a Roman Catholic town in a little old church building. Dad baptized over sixty converts when the two weeks were over. That happened in a town right where the very seat of the beast was. How was that accomplished? It was through prayer. They prayed, and the power of God was manifested.

God can still convince the gain-sayer that he is wrong, but it is not going to come about by eloquent speech or long years in service. Too many are resting on the fact that they have been around for forty years, but spiritually, they are as weak as a church mouse. The power of God does not rest in that; it rests in how much fervent praying you are doing before God.

The Psalmist said in Psalm 62:11-12: "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O LORD, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work." You can be strong in the Lord and in His might and power by spending time in prayer, earnestly seeking His face.

Paul instructed us to redeem the time. Why? Prayer is not on people's minds much; in fact, the very powers of hell are warring against prayer. Lawmakers have removed it from the schools, and many people do not really want it in the churches. The devil will let you say prayers, read prayers, and go through forms, but he gets stirred when you get down in fervency and earnestness and really get hold of God.

If you will study old Israel, the morning-time church, and the reformation, you will find that they became busy with many material things. My friend, we are in an age of great activity. Much is going on, and there is a tendency to stress the things that are seen, the material things, and to neglect the unseen and spiritual realities.

The Fire of God

There never was a time when God's people were not religious. No matter how much they apostatized, they were still religious, and they always said their prayers. Read about Israel in the Old Testament. They still went to the temple and offered sacrifices, but they were merely going through a form. That is the reason God asked them why they were coming before Him and having assemblies and offering a multitude of sacrifices.

Then coming right over to the New Testament, in 2 Timothy, Chapter 3, Paul pictured a terrible falling away. He said that people would be lovers of their own selves and that children would be disobedient to parents. Sin of every kind was going on in their hearts and lives, yet they still had a form of godliness, or in other words, they remained religious.

These things are also going on today. People are just as backslidden as they can be over the country, and congregations have apostatized, but they are still religious, still claiming to be the people of God, and still calling themselves the Church of God. This is the way the devil works.

Even though those people say their prayers, they have lost the real fire, without which all praying will degenerate into a lifeless form.

In the Old Testament, when they brought their sacrifices, God told them to lay their sacrifices on the altar and let the priest pray, but no one was to light a fire. If it was pleasing, God sent the fire down out of Heaven, and that fire was to let them know that they had pleased God.

The same is true in the New Testament: without the fire falling, we have no way of being assured that God has been pleased with our living and our praying. Someone may ask, "Isn't prayer symbolized in the Old Testament as incense?" It is a symbol of prayer in the Book of Revelation, and also back in the old tabernacle they offered incense. Now, it took effort and toil to prepare the incense because many things had to be beaten together. By the same token, real prayer is no slug-gard's work; real prayer takes effort.

They did not get some incense out of a box and God lite the fire to it. No, they had to gather this ointment and that ingredient, beat it small, work it together, and lay it out before God. After all the preparations had been made and they laid it out before God, the fire was needed to unloose the incense and cause it to rise unto God.

This may be a simple message, but I hope you get the point: we can offer all the incense there is; but without the fire of God, we will never get it off the place we are offering it. It takes the fire of God to reach down and ignite it and cause it to go up in a pleasing fragrance to Him; otherwise, it cannot be done. Do not be deceived! When will the fire fall? When you do it according to God's will and your life lines up with the Word.

Even the high priest (and he, in that sense, was higher than you are until you become a son of God), who had to take in the incense, trembled as he took it in. The Bible tells us that he took some blood with him for his own errors and for the errors of the

people. Why did he tremble? He knew that if his life was not clear and the sacrifice on the brazen altar had not fully covered him, and if he did not come in the right way, he would fall dead. He had bells on his robe, and if they heard the bells quit ringing, they went in and carried him out.

Since Jesus Christ, through His blood, has opened a new and living way for us to go into that holiest place where the high priest went, do you think that you can enter there in just any kind of shape? No, my friend. I pray that God will help you and will stir your heart. If only people would really pray, every circumstance could be changed, the lost could be saved, and many who are not healed could get healed.

Without the fire of God our prayers have no spirit or fervency. Paul said that the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much; it is the fire of God that makes it fervent and puts heat to it.

Prayer and Holy Living

Apostasy always begins in the prayer closet. You can apostatize and fall away from the experience that you once had, and if you are not careful, you will look at your outward standards, your church attendance, and your giving. Why not get to the very heart of it: how is your prayer life? Every up-to-date, spiritual member of the church is ever knocking on that secret closet where the Father brings you in secrecy. If you really pray and keep your prayer life as up to date as it needs to be, you will never apostatize on any other line.

Prayer and holy living are one: they mutually act and react; one cannot survive without the other. Unless you really take time to pray, you will not be holy. You can take time to pray and not live right and your prayers will not mean anything. Holy living and prayer act and react together. You must be careful lest your praying become nothing more than vain repetition. Your prayers

can become depraved.

The spirit of that beast spoken of in the Revelation is going out to the whole world. Church of God, how can he work on you? He is not trying to get you to confess your sins to some priest. However, that spirit can work on you just as it has worked on others; then your prayers will become vain repetition, and instead of real holy living, we you will have superstition. The word *superstition* in the dictionary means "false religion."

The spirit of the beast is working, and it is working beyond the realms of Roman Catholicism. The Bible says that it has gone out to the whole world. We are in danger of substituting church work for real prayer and holy living; that is how the spirit of the beast works. You can get very busy at church work, and you can even get too busy at it. I have to keep telling myself this. Why? You can go fast and say, "I am really wrapped up in church work," and lose out in your experience right while you are doing it without spending real time in prayer.

You may say, "Oh, I couldn't be lost doing church work!" Thousands have been. How is it in your prayer closet? I am not talking in terms of time. I am not asking anyone to pray forty days and forty nights. However, I am telling you that you need to get down before God and pray until God has accepted you in prayer and warmed your heart with a precious up-to-date moving of His Holy Spirit.

People may say, "Well, a holy life cannot be lived in a closet." It cannot be lived without the prayer closet. I realize that you do the living after you get out, but you cannot live holy without it. Certainly, there is much church work which needs to be done, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed.

Martin Luther once said, "I have a busy day and much to do tomorrow. I must get up three hours earlier and spend it in prayer." He looked at prayer just the opposite of the way we do. We do not think we have time to pray, but they took time to pray. If

you have a busy day scheduled with many things ahead of you, then you need to spend more time in prayer than when you do not have so many things to do.

Someone may say, "You shouldn't read those old books." You cannot show me a modern one that will do me any good. Why would I want to read after these later preachers who tell you that God does not heal anymore! They tell people that God only healed the sick in prepenicillin days. God does not care whether or not penicillin is available to you; it makes no difference to Him when it comes to healing people.

God Is a Respector of Prayers

Men such as John and Charles Wesley were men of prayer. I read about when John Wesley was on a ship reading the Bible, and a man who was sitting in a deck chair beside him said, "Mr. Wesley, don't you know that we haven't moved a mile or a mile and a half in two days? The wind is against us."

He said, "No, I didn't notice. Just a moment." He looked up and said, "Father, You handle the wind. You are the master of every circumstance. Father, we need to be in New York in so many days."

The man sitting beside him started crying and said, "The wind is blowing, Mr. Wesley. Look at the sails!"

He merely replied, "Oh, yes," and went back to reading the Word. There was nothing exciting about it to him, for he had often prayed and received an answer.

Now that same God is at our disposal. God did not love John Wesley any more than He loves you. God is no respecter of persons, but He is a respector of prayers. It is only when the whole heart is gripped with the passion of prayer that life-giving fire descends. James taught us that none but the earnest man ever reaches the ear of God. You have to be earnest, and when you are, God sees it.

In Luke 18:8 Jesus asked the question, ". . . when the Son of man

cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" Someone may ask, "What does that have to do with prayer?" Well, anyone who has real faith is a praying individual. God does not let you have faith that you do not use any more than He will give you light that you do not have to walk in.

In Luke 12:35 Jesus said, "Let our loins be girded about, and our lights burning." Church of God, let us make sure the lamps of faith and the lamps of prayer are burning brightly. Those are two things that Jesus is going to look for when He comes. In Matthew, Chapter 25, Jesus told the parable of the ten virgins, five of which had allowed their lamps to go out. How we need to tremble!

One has well said, "To graduate in the school of prayer is to master the whole course of religious life." People who did not know how to read or write (and I am not advocating illiteracy) were great strong, stalwart men and women for God; they knew how to pray.

Even though Jesus knew that the furtherance of the kingdom was going to rest on the Apostles, never one time did He teach them to preach; but He taught them to pray. Why is that? If God has called you to preach and you are a prayer warrior, you can preach, and you will preach effectively. On the other hand, you can take all the training there is for preaching, but if you do not have a secret closet of prayer and your prayer life is not what it ought to be, you will never be effective in preaching the Word.

The same principle applies when it comes to living the Word. Your happiness and success in life depend on prayer. The salvation of the lost, even some of your own flesh and blood, depends on your prayers. You might as well get rid of the idea that they are going to accidentally drop in some night and get saved. No one ever got saved (unless it was the Apostle Paul) without someone somewhere praying for him.

"Ask of Me"

There was a minister that I heard about whose wife was in a coma and

had been given up to die. They told him that she was a vegetable and would never be any different. He said that he wanted to take her home and take care of her. However, they said that he must never try to move her without flying, because she would die if he tried to take her home in their motor home. So he called the airlines, and they told him it would cost him ten thousand dollars because they would have to take out so many seats and put in a bed, and that he would have to sign a paper that the airlines would not be responsible if she died on the way.

He did not have that kind of money, so he thought of a friend of his who was a wealthy Christian man who owned a Lear jet. He called the man's home, and one of his parents said, "I'm sorry, but he is not here. He is vacationing." When he asked for a telephone number so he could call him, his parent said, "I'm sorry, but he wouldn't give us a number. He said he was so worn out that he was taking a month off, and he wouldn't let anyone know where he could be reached."

So the man got down and prayed, "Lord, You know where he is; I don't know. Have him call me." Before he got up off his knees, the telephone rang, and it was his friend. He said, "How did you come to call me?" His friend said, "Well, I was sitting out in the sun down by the beach and all at once God told me I had better call. What do you need?" He said, "I need that jet. I know it costs several hundred dollars to keep a Lear jet up, but I need it."

He told him the condition of his wife, and his friend asked, "When do you need me?" He said, "Eight o'clock Monday morning." At eight o'clock Monday morning the jet landed. In five minutes time, God had supplied his need.

We read in Isaiah 64:4, "For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him." Then, as we read earlier in Psalm 2:8, God

said, "Ask of me. . . ." Nothing is impossible with God if you can believe. Who would have faith to get on his knees, and on a crowded beach expect God to pick that man out and burden him to go to the telephone, but He did. There is no limit to what God wants to do for His people if we will only get on praying ground.

God said in 2 Chronicles 7:14, ""If my people, which are called by my name, [The condition of the whole world rests on praying people. My Scripture text told us to pray for those in authority, kings, and potentates, so that we might live a peaceful and happy life and live in holiness and righteousness before God. When catastrophes come on the land, where is God looking? He is not looking to leaders of nations. He said, 'If my people'; that is the key.] shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

What a responsible position we stand in! Salvation has been taken too lightly. Selfish spirits have so gotten hold of people that all they think about is just what they themselves have to do to make Heaven. There is more to living for God than that. When we got saved, He washed us in His blood and made us kings and priests. Why have we been made priests? To intercede.

I pray that every honest heart will open to God and in honesty, and if it is true, say, "Lord, my prayer lamp and my faith lamp has not been burning very bright. Now after reading the Word, I am fearful that it might go out as it did in the parable of the foolish virgins. I want to humble myself. I want to seek Your face, Lord. I want You to teach me how to pray."

Jesus has never quit teaching the saints how to pray. He taught the disciples. If you will study it, you will see that it was an order of prayer. He will teach you individually how to pray and get hold of God if you will ask of Him.