

# THE HERALD OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

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## Discerning the Will of God

*"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" -- 1 Thessalonians 4:3*

One of the most perplexing questions to face man has been the seemingly simple one: "How do I discern the will of the Lord?" For very elementary reasons the prominence of this question during any period of history (that is, how frequently it need be asked, and by how many) may serve as an accurate spiritual barometer of the people of God.

The question is not perplexing because there is no answer. The Scriptures are clear in this matter. In fact, it may be that because answers are so plainly given that the question becomes the more annoying. An annoyance? Yes, for many times the answers may not be those the questioner had in mind. In fact, it seems so inherently human to ask this question most ardently when one has already decided what they would like to do and when they wish divine sanction for their already determined course of action. It seems equally human to ask repeatedly as long as the answer comes back "NO," in some vain hope that the questioner may "wear down" God and convince him to change his divine will to fit our human desire. James, quite accurately describes this procedure when speaking of how men deal with temptation, blaming it upon God. James says,

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed (James 1:13-14).

In the extreme we find no better explanation for the rise (both in this world and among the body of believers) of such ideas as "situation ethics" and "modern morality" than mankind's dissatisfaction with God's standards of behavior.

A second glance at the question suggests that it is not a simple one. The range of human experience causes one to wonder whether the answer would necessarily encompass all human endeavor. We are, after all, individually very different. One scriptural character used dew-laden

fleece to answer to his question (Judges 6:36). In another instance cloven tongues of fire provided an answer. The Jewish nation went to the Urim and the Thummin for answers. Because of the writer's unique personality he may look to avenues for guidance that maybe no reader would--or perhaps all readers. Variables such as these notwithstanding, there remain simple, comprehensive answers to the query, "How do I discern the Will of God?"

Before seeking answers consider a few examples of the will of God.

Moses spent some forty years in the wilderness in order to prepare him for the task of leading God's people from Egypt.

King David longed for the honor of building a house for God but God would not allow a man of war to erect his abiding place.

Job suffered the loss of family and possessions to demonstrate to spiritual creatures the nature of true faith.

Each instance involved discerning the will of God. How each man must have pondered the rightness or wrongness of actions he had taken or would have liked to have taken. Moses found himself in the wilderness because of his own shortness of temper. David was denied in part because of his warring ways. Job suffered injustice because of events of which he was actually ignorant. All their pondering did not change one fact: The will of the Lord was accomplished even though the involved ones did not understand the significance of what transpired. Moreover, God was glorified in them all!

### **Where Do We Look For Answers?**

First, and perhaps most importantly, we mention the rather obvious fact that doing anyone else's will requires submission. You cannot please another if you are intent upon self satisfaction. But submission can be cloaked, feigned, or pretended. One may pretend to please another person while manipulating them; or pretend to do what they want while pleasing self. When self-will is present another's will cannot be done. A part of determining the Lord's will is in letting go of self-will.

We turn to the words of our Master: *"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"* (John 7:17). This singular statement forms a fundamental principle concerning the will of the Lord.

Jesus presents "willingness" to serve God as crucial to the understanding of his will-his teaching. *"He shall know."* Such simple words. Such a simple promise: if we truly wish to do his will God will enable us to understand his will, yea to discern between godly instruction and human teaching. What an immense spiritual power is thus simply stated! Where can there be room for uncertainty about what course of action to pursue if such is truly the case? But by what strange power can this ability to understand come? Is it magical? Is it mystical? Does God especially intervene to open our eyes. Probably on occasion. But the answer is frequently much more basic and elementary than relying upon mystical phenomenon which no one can explain, else the plain people to whom Jesus and Paul say the gospel would come, those not wise, not noble, etc., would never have been able to deal with the pros and cons of their daily lives.

Note the context of these words. The knowledge being discussed is one of discernment. What has been promised is the ability to discern between godliness and ungodliness: to recognize them for

what they are. What is promised is understanding: the ability to have contact with a thing, a person, an idea and to fit it into the grand matrix of all creation; allowing it to manifest its own validity or falsehood. Such is the very "basic" skill which Jesus manifested in his every conversation with men. Discerning from their words and actions the troubles which lay at their heart; their desire to trap him in some technicality; the honest open heart which sought a message from the Sent One of God, he ministered to each and every one words of life from the storehouse of his experience with God and the written Word. Such was also the wisdom of Paul, Peter, John and others who taught *"not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect"* (1 Cor. 1:17).

Note a curiosity of Scripture which may help us to understand the doctrine of God and why such a crucial issue as how to discern God's will may be correctly stated so simply and unequivocally.

There is a uniqueness to the references which the later prophets and the Apostles make to their predecessors the earlier prophets. First, they generally refer less frequently to the writings of those earlier men of God than do many Christians today. The Apostles had things to say which extended beyond what had been written before. And so at times they quoted in full context from the prophets, at times in part, and at times they even seem to quote quite out of context jumbling ideas from several verses together seemingly indiscriminately. Yet that their words are undeniably inspired is proven by the consistency and harmony which they bear to the ideas championed by earlier messengers of God. As much as they may seem out of context, the appropriateness of their application is always self-evident. The common characteristic between them and the Prophets which were before them was an ability to distill life down to the principles of God and apply them in whatever situation they found themselves-through the grace, power and wisdom of God. It was not necessary for God to reveal himself in every decision. They had come to know him intimately. They knew his character, they understood somewhat of his plans, and they knew what he expected of them. It was not necessary to launch trial balloons at every decision because their hearts and minds were at one with him-they had partaken of his spirit and had nurtured that gift until they began to think, act, and hope as did he. Moreover, when he expanded his revelation to man it can be seen that newly the revealed features of God's plan were in harmony with all those which preceded and followed. The characteristics of God are constant and they manifest themselves similarly throughout history. And so it was that godly men of old set out upon a course. In a prayerful attitude they continued about their daily business using the principles which he had taught them and they most needed his special guidance at times when-to them-his plan took on a new aspect. Thus we see the controversy which raged for a short time in connection with the then "new light" extending the Gospel message to the Gentiles.

Those who abide under the shadow of the Almighty learn to rely upon his unchangeableness and take their inspiration from the verity, that is the truth, of all his revelations. He is a Rock. His word is sure, never changing, setting a sure and certain course. Each subsequent dealing with man expands upon that of which God previously revealed. And most of all, when we err he remains true. When we are correct we can not detract from his truth -- we only confirm it.

Note in overview a few basic principles of God. These are not all of the principles which govern his will for men but they illustrate the considerations necessary in answering the question: How do I discern the will of God? Note that they offer incontrovertible advice: God is sure and his Word offers a sure course of action under any circumstance. Whether or not we choose to accept his will.

**Singleminded**

*"Let love be without dissimulation [or "pretence"]. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9). These words are little more than a restatement of "...let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. " (James 5:12). From them we learn an essential lesson: NO form of double-mindedness can be countenanced. Man is what he is, just like the old adage, "...a rose, is a rose, is a rose." A double minded man, saying first one thing and then another, is a liar, just as much as the man who lies and knows that he is not telling the truth. The double minded man is not only ignorant of his own lies; he often thinks himself better than the man who lies publicly. "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter?" (James 3:10-11) In order to please God a man's words must agree with his actions and all must be honest and open. Anything else comes of deceit. Any situation in which a person places themselves which requires lies, speaking evil (of a person, another company, a product) causes such a one to send forth bitter and sweet water. Hypocrisy is never the Will of God. Our religious life cannot be separated from our family life; or business from our social life: that would be as hypocrisy.*

### **Separate from Sin**

*"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (1 Thess. 4:3). ANYTHING which works against the sanctification of a person is NOT the will of God. Any act, word, thought, occupation, pastime, sport, business, residence, or possession which detracts from our sanctity or leads us to serve another god is not pleasing to him; it is working out sin -- rather than sanctity -- in our life. Anything, the pursuit of which detracts from our sanctification, is not pleasing to God -- no matter how much we can justify its continuance on the grounds of our using it to serve others. By such false logic many have done evil so that good may result. The Apostle Paul teaches us that such activities are not pleasing (Rom. 3:8). God is not fooled. A man will reap what he sows.*

### **Filled With Love for Others**

*"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother" (1 John 3:10). "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8). ANYTHING which reduces our capacity to love another leads one away from God. Barriers of suspicion, doubt, and questions about others do not lead us towards God: whether they be manifest towards our brethren in Christ or whether they are felt towards thieves, murderers, or those who are most despised by this world. We cannot expect to live in surroundings which encourage such feelings without recognizing the detrimental effect they can have upon our spirit. We cannot be suspicious during our working life, our business arrangements, or our family life and then expect to display God-likeness at other times. Our character is constant. We are one person. One character. We have one way of thinking, one way of behaving: and that way must include love for our fellows. Any duality is not of God. It is merely our excuse for avoiding responsibility for bringing our lives into accord with what we know to be pleasing to God. Jesus, knowing the prominence of Love in God's character, provides the ultimate example for us. He was found among all echelons of men, teaching and preaching to whomever would listen: even to those who were not of the people of God (John 4), his chosen nation.*

### **Godly Characteristics**

*"Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy. and truth shall go before thy face"* (Psa. 89:14). Here, in a worldly axiom, there has been said a mouthful. Four simple words. Yet the principles behind them become the habitation of God's throne. What is a habitation other than a dwelling place? God is said to live (figuratively) in justice, judgment, mercy and truth. These principles form the foundation within which all of his dealings with men fall and their violation can never be pleasing to God.

Just judgment tempered with mercy and truth is an elegant goal not easily attained in the run of daily life. We are confronted with moral dilemmas. It is easy to be unjust, to take advantage of others, to extract a slightly higher price of them than we have the right to do and especially so in modern commerce. All one need do is not to be critical of one's own actions. Much of this world's activity is related to the getting and retaining of money and goods. And here, on a level almost imperceptible to many, is a life and death battle for our individual integrity -- yea for our lives. Integrity is a word not often heard, but it is scriptural. It was Job's integrity to which God directed Satan's attention during his tests: *"and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause"* (2:3, cf. vss. 9; 27:5; 31:6). Here are four examples of how these principles may be applied:

Justice: I must not exact more than that which is due me and conversely I must give at least all that is expected of me -- full measure, pressed down, and filled to overflowing: not grudgingly.

Judgment: I must be accurate in my estimates of all I do. Not requiring obedience to things which I myself refuse to obey nor disobeying in things that I hold others accountable for. It has been said that he who would borrow an umbrella on a rainy day without first asking permission is no more worthy of eternal life than the thief or robber. While the example may appear extreme it is the thorough extension of a characteristic which must be present throughout our character if we would be God-like.

Mercy: While exacting the most precise justice and judgment of self I must be willing NOT to exact the same precision from others. Many people are willing to suffer in order to obtain something that they want badly enough. Education is a prime example. Consider how many Christians spend years training for a job which they anticipate will repay them over the 30 or 40 years of their working lives. A few are willing to suffer loss for having done something good. Noble efforts are self-rewarding even if the end of the effort does not meet one's original expectation. But there are few indeed who are willing to suffer loss for the failure, the error, or the foolishness of another. Such is the love that our Lord Jesus showed towards us, having died for us when we were "yet sinners."

Truth: At the surface this might appear the easiest of God's principles to apply to one's life, yet experience shows that it is often the most difficult. To allow that which is true to have its full influence upon your mind and life is very difficult. In times past men were put to death by their contemporaries who thought that the earth was flat. The facts of truth did not mitigate against their sufferings because those who exercised power were just as sure that THEY were right. Truth forces a man to continually re-evaluate his course of action. Life becomes easy when one reaches an age at which they think they have gotten it "figured out." But it is just then that man begins to have experiences which challenge various of his learned beliefs. Those who are exercised thereby grow. Those who refuse become the bigots of the next generation to whom the Lord has spoken harshly in every generation: *"Woe unto you ye blind guides..."* (Matt. 23:16). Such words are harsh but they have been repeated only too often during the past two thousand years.

Some may say that these principles are too broad to offer positive guidance in such a changing world. Is that true? Or is it that we don't want to hear their answer? If a man has the choice of jobs, or of new homes, or of automobiles is there sufficient guidance from the Eternal Principles of God to make a decision? Without hesitation we are assured that the answer is YES! If God could use such physical principles to place the planets in orbit, can we not learn to govern our lives by spiritual principles. No man would step off an eight story building without suffering the consequences of his own actions: few there be who would foolishly expect the principle of gravity not to have its effect upon their fleshly body. But there is a spiritual parallel which is re-enacted everyday in every country around the world: men disobey spiritual rules of and hope that they will not be affected.

Doing the will of God is not difficult. Doing the will of God requires first of all that we DO what he asks. It does not mean that we keep asking until we get the answer we want. It does not mean that we find every reason imaginable to do what we are inclined to do. It does not mean that we ignore the instructions that he has already given us. It also does not mean that God's eternal principles will change just because we have something contrary in mind! Most of all it does not mean making an effort to find out what God would like us to do because others have taught us that is what we are supposed to do and then in following their example instead of God's. Search the Scriptures, for in them you will find eternal life. Search the Scriptures, for in them you will find the principles of God -- principles which he has used to form and rule the universe -- ourselves included. These can do for the human heart devoted to his pleasure what the physical principles do for creation. Jesus put it clearly to the Apostles on the night before his crucifixion:

*"if a man love me, he will keep my commandments."*

- P. J. Pazucha

## **The Annual Meeting**

The sixty-eighth Annual Meeting of the members of the Pastoral Bible Institute, Inc., was held Saturday, June 4, at 11:00 a.m. at 4454 S. 14th Street, Milwaukee WI.

After customary devotions, Brother J. L. Busswas elected chairman of the meeting, and Br. A. Jarmola, secretary. Next followed the reading and approval of the minutes of the previous meeting. The annual report of the directors was presented. The financial statement, is published alongside, the Director's Report appears in full on pages 7- 8 of this issue of the HERALD.

The names of recently deceased members were read, as were the names of new institute members during the preceding twelve months. Next followed the election of a new board. Sr. Ann-Truth Lange and Sr. Arlene Jones) were appointed tellers. While the ballots were counted the rest of the friends enjoyed a season of fellowship in praise and testimony. The names of those brethren elected as directors were read at the conclusion of the count: A. Gonczewski, A. Jarmola, P. J. Pazucha, L. Petran, T. M. Thomassen, J. B. Webster, L. R. Webster.

A discussion of possible future activities by the institute and the status of the pilgrim service followed and a devotional service concluded the meeting.

The new board met following the Annual Meeting. Among those actions taken was the election of officers whose names follow: L. R. Webster, Chairman; T. M. Thomassen, Vice Chairman; L. Petran, Secretary-Treasurer; P. J. Pazucha, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer. Editorial Committee: A. L. Jones, P. J. Pazucha, L. Petran, T. M. Thomassen, B. Kuehmicel.

On Sunday the fifth of June the members assembled with the Milwaukee Bible Students Ecclesia in convention.

**FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**  
**FISCAL YEAR ENDED APRIL 30, 1988**

**(1) Balance Sheet as of April 30, 1988**

**Assets**

Cash on hand		\$15,315.18
U. S. Treasury Bills		58,456.81
M & I Partnership Savings Account		12,151.81
Accounts Receivable		265.00
Interest Receivable		987.56
Prepaid Expense		500.00
Inventory:		
Pocket Edition-Divine Plan (140)	\$ 140.00	
J. T. Read Tapes	\$1,258.20	
Miscellaneous Items	\$ 202.48	
Total Inventory	\$1,600.68	<u>1,600.68</u>

**Fixed Assets**

Office Equipment	13,539.32	
Accumulated Depreciation	<u>6,720.00</u>	
Balance	6,819.32	6,819.32
PBI Library		<u>3,000.00</u>
Total Assets		<u>\$116,164.24</u>
Liabilities		<u>                  .</u>
Berean Bible Institute, Australia	\$125.00	
Herald Subscriptions Paid in Advance	<u>\$950.00</u>	
Total	\$1,075.00	<u>\$ 1,075.00</u>
Net Worth (as per analysis below)		<u>\$115,089.24</u>

**(2) Statement of Income and Expense and Analysis of Net Worth**  
**Fiscal Year Ended April 30, 1988**

**Income**

Contributions		\$35,603.49
Herald Subscriptions		6,559.00
Legacies		340.08
Interest Earned		<u>4,494.45</u>
Total Income		\$47,634.02

**Operating Expense**

Pilgrim Expense		\$ 3,705.96
Herald Expense		7,093.67
Office Staff		12,400.00
Free literature and Herald Subscriptions		798.54
Administrative and Office Expense		2,912.97
Office Rent & Utilities		3,368.29
Depreciation of Office Equipment		4,212.00
Library		<u>32.00</u>
Total Operating Expense		34,523.43
Net Expense for Fiscal Year Ended April 30, 1988		\$ 13,110.59
Net Worth, May 1, 1987		<u>110,978.65</u>
Net Worth, April 30, 1988 (as per Balance Sheet above)		\$115,089.24

## **The Directors Report 1988**

*"My times are in thy hand..." Psalm 31:15*

Time passes. As it does the remaining years of a person's life grow the more important to the Lord's people: their limitations become more noticeable and the privileges of divine service grow more precious. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" (Psa. 90:12). Greatest among our personal privileges is assisting prospective members of the heavenly Bride to prepare to meet their Lord, the Bridegroom. "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1:12). The directors of the Pastoral Bible Institute thank God for their past share in this work: for the wondrous privileges, the sobering responsibilities, and for seeing their own limitations—a task which all must face in the performance of assigned duties. The coming year is faced with great joy because the year past has showered so many blessings upon the Institute—and increased the weight of our stewardship. Such blessings give one greater cause for diligence in the administration of the Institute's affairs while at the same time rejoicing the hearts of its servants.

In the Apostle's days the work of ministering was shared. Experience shows this to be the wisest course and both the board of directors and the editorial committee have stressed a sharing of responsibilities and blessings—to say nothing of the testings and trials which must accompany the first two, more joyous privileges. Those associated in this work rejoice in the spiritual unity and consecrated attitudes which have existed among them. That the Lord's spirit has its place among us can be attested by the Apostle Paul, who tell us that such can only be accomplished "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (Eph. 4:2,3).

The passing year brings earth a year closer to the day when the Lord shall take his own to himself and begin the work of blessing all men. The Master's words still teach the importance of a fervent desire, as they have for nearly two millennia: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). That kingdom cannot come, Scripture forces one to realize, before the church has made herself ready. Until the marriage of the Lamb, ending the preparation of the bride (Rev. 19:5) there can be no rebirth, no life giving, no favors extended, nor blessings showered upon a redeemed race. How can one realize these contingencies without feeling an urgency to act? The church's completion must precede his coming "in power and great glory" to rule the earth. -- This burden lies on all believers and each must make themselves ready!

At its founding in 1918 the Institute was so structured as to minimize the effect that any person, any persuasion, or any group should have upon its mission: the dissemination of Bible truths. This, we find to be an important scriptural concept. The body of Christ grows "...by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, [making] increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16).

### **Forms of Service**

The Institute is still in pursuit of the spread of the Gospel in a variety of ways. Pamphlets and publications play an important part in distributing the Gospel message to those who have hearing ears. The HERALD of CHRIST'S KINGDOM is the most successful tool at our disposal. Through it we bring to those who are associated with us the true, honest, just, pure, lovely, things of good report (Phil. 4:8) that Paul encourages us to consider. Those who labor in this work are few, if through this message others can themselves be sent to the Word to find inspiration then

indeed the HERALD serves as a means to multiply the work of harvesting and to this end we pray (Luke 10:2).

Messages of comfort and appreciation are received in abundance from subscribers to the HERALD. While we'd like to share some of these with you time and space do not allow. The editors take this time to express appreciation to those who have written but whom, because of limitations of time and ability, we have been unable to thank in person or by mail. Annual correspondence numbers in the thousands of letters but it is still not possible to answer every inquiry, nor to enter into the degree of detail that specific questions might suggest. Your understanding is appreciated.

Graciously, the Lord allows us a modest service. Great works have not been providential, nor have the directors fantasized projects to appear greater in the sight of men. We rejoice in offering the fruit of our combined efforts in the variety of materials for distribution listed on the back cover of most issues of the Herald.

Pilgrim services are available to Bible classes and isolated individuals. If you would like to be visited contact us. Our visits are not restricted to large groups. Those who labor in this work can attest that visits with the "ones and twos" have sometimes been the most spiritually beneficial. Indeed, "...where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). When travel costs or accommodations are not available the Institute is in a position, by the Lord's grace and the kindness of brethren, to underwrite these. He loves and cares for you, as he has testified through Paul: "...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

### **Suggestions And Sharing**

Periodically, suggestions are offered to improve our ministry. We are grateful for such. No director or editor claims a monopoly over truth, or its exposition. Nor should this Institute, or any organization, be considered the single, sole, "channel" of divine knowledge. The Lord's own are not "entrusted" to the Institute more than they are to another group. The Lord's people are "one here" and "one there," and he knoweth them that are his (2 Tim. 2:19). He cares for them (1 Pet. 5:7) whatever their situation and he nurtures each as they need and as he sees fit-not as some organization may teach.

Among such suggestions were those mailed in response to our readership survey. We appreciate all who took time to respond. Over twenty percent of our readers did and your suggestions are providing much food for consideration. One interesting insight your comments provided was the large number of readers who wished that the Herald's message concentrate upon the needs of those already part of the body of consecrated believers. Another, perhaps more difficult area to address, were suggestions to provide some features for those younger, spiritually inclined readers.

This ministry is one of cooperative sharing. The works in which your elected and appointed brethren are engaged are those to which all Christians are encouraged. If you sympathize with its spirit and activities you are invited to share in its efforts. One means is through the printed word. As has long been the case, brethren with writing ability are invited to share their thoughts, in article form, for the consideration of the wider fellowship that read the HERALD. Outside contributions often receive favorable comment by our readers and we reiterate our longstanding invitation at this time.

To our readers, we have a reminder. For your convenience the authors of articles are identified where possible. This is not because of some egotistical attitude on the part of contributors. We have been able because of these attributions to publish a wider range of material than we might if you, our readers, expected every word printed in the HERALD to be a "teaching of the Institute." We, by this open editorial policy, encourage the study and the consideration of Bible truths, to stir up your mind (and ours) by way of remembrance. It is important to recognize, however, that it is an individual duty to prove them all (1 Thess. 5:21). You are encouraged to do so -- and to hold fast to the good.

### **The End of the Age**

Contacts with our brethren and the experiences that they endure points one's mind to the approaching end of the age. There is an increased need of comfort and confirmation among the saints of God that their faith "fail not" (cf. Luke 22:32; John 13:19). The mind is leakier than the heart and many need be reminded of the clarity of the Bible's teachings about events to transpire among believers and those to come upon the nations of earth. Important also are words of sobriety and watchfulness-because we all, at times, need a fan to keep the fire of zeal burning to the glory of our Master. May God help all of his own to attend to these ministries as they have opportunity.

An understanding of the scriptures must precede any attempt to represent Christ Jesus, our Lord. In balance, however, it is known among HERALD readers that the spirit of tolerance continues to be a major emphasis of our ministry. Consideration must be given to the intelligent understanding of Christ's teachings, but such is of little value unless met by an understanding heart and a living appreciation. As a result, the HERALD continues to present "spirituality" as a prime aim of the Christian life. By this is included the spirit of devotion to God, the spirit of consecrated living to God, the need for practical application of the principles of truth and justice in one's life. Through these, and not only through knowledge, is the sanctifying work of the spirit of God achieved in men (John 17:17).

### **What Hope For the Future?**

As for the future, we look to the Psalmist for words to express our confidence in divine guidance: "*My times are in thy hand...*" (Psa. 31:15). Those walking in the light of truth, like a lamp shining upon their path (Psa. 119:105) recognize the solemnity of these long prophesied days. This world and the course of the church of Christ are interrelated. The assembly of the Church of the First-Born in heavenly glory must precede the release of this world from its bondage, and the early deliverance of the saints is dependent upon their resistance during the hour of temptation which is to try all those upon the earth (Rev. 3:10). The saints of God suffer only those things which are common among men (1 Cor. 10:13), but the faith and spiritual vision which is developed in those believers is uncommon indeed. By these the disciples of Christ are manifest; they appreciate the outcome of this "present evil world" and come to sympathize with the distressed billions of mankind. Only the inauguration of the reign of righteousness can answer the groanings of the world or ease the hearts of those that mourn for others in distress.

It would be wrong to want-too strongly-to draw aside the curtain of uncertainty that surrounds the events of men. What will be the final experiences of the church? When will the union of the entire church with her Lord take place? Might not the Master say to us as he said to the disciples, that some things are not due to be understood? Is it not better for us to find contentment in the abundance we have received from God than to pine for what we lack of understanding? The

faithful of old who preceded this generation in death did so under the discipline of faith. A growth in grace such as they displayed is sure to teach the wisdom of the hymn,

I know not what awaits me,  
God kindly veils mine eyes,  
And o'er each step of my onward way  
He makes new scenes to rise;  
And ev'ry joy he sends me comes  
A sweet and glad surprise.

Beloved in Christ, the eye of faith sees a glorious prospect for the church and the groaning creation. "All things are onward moving," therefore let us lift our heads with joy. *"There failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken..."* (Josh. 21:45). He will at last bring his faithful children out of the darkness of sin into the glory and splendor of his glorious presence. *"Thou wilt spew me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore"* (Psa. 16:11). Amen!

Your brethren in the Master's service,  
L. Petran, Secretary

## God Seeketh Such - Part 1

*"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshipers." - John 4:23, R. V*

In order to appreciate the importance John, the beloved disciple, placed upon the conversation Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, we must consider two factors: What purpose did John have in choosing material for his Gospel; What was the time like for which he wrote? Appreciating these two points will prepare us to appreciate a third -- the most important of all -- the value of true worship and devotion to every Christian believer.

The other three evangelists attempted to record what happened during Jesus' life. But John did not report "...all that Jesus began to do and teach" (Acts 1:1) as Luke attempted to do, nor did he record the genealogy of the Lord back to Abraham (as did Matthew) or to Adam (as did Luke). There is at least one statement attributed to Jesus (by Paul) of which John makes no mention whatsoever: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35).

It is likely that Jesus did many things that were not recorded by any of the Gospel writers. Conversely, given their dull hearing, he probably repeated things on several occasions and under different circumstances to enhance their retention of his teachings. This practice helps us to account for sayings that various Gospels record in connection with different episodes (cf. Matt. 24; Luke 12:35-48; 17: 22-37; 21:5-36). Apart from this practice we would be left in doubt about the accuracy of the Gospel writers; with it we are not left to question.

We are also reminded that there were no written records of these events for at least twenty years after Pentecost (none have survived if any ever existed). During that time the stories of Jesus' words and miracles were transmitted orally, being verified by those who had heard them (Heb. 2:3). This fund of information passed from lip to lip and those who had not known the Lord drew upon it for their own accounts. In the light of this fact we are astounded that the accounts differ so minimally. This is a testimony to the supervising influence of the holy Spirit.

Mark and Luke wrote at first hand, as immediate eyewitnesses. John wrote later in time and for a different purpose. It is these differences that make cross referencing his Gospel with the others so difficult. Apparently John (under the influence of the holy Spirit) did not compile his Gospel as did Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John presented the story of Jesus of Nazareth to the younger generation of his time in such a way that Jesus would appear to them as the Christ, the Son of the Living God (*John 20:30,31*). He does not seem to have recorded the events in their chronological order. Rather, he seems to have selected and assembled the story point by point so that when it was set forth it would depict the threefold cord which ran throughout Jesus' ministry: life (John 1:4); light (John 1:9); John 8:12; John 9:5 and love (John 3:16; John 14:23). Upon the weight of these points John's readers could be led to no other conclusion than that Jesus was the Christ.

A third of his account is given to the story of Jesus' last days in Jerusalem. Here he gives specific evidence that Jesus was what he claimed. From the basin and the towel through his incomparably intimate committal prayer we witness a relationship to the Almighty God that none other has ever experienced.

We take time to mention the forcefulness of John's account of Jesus' Temple teachings (chapters 7 and 8). "... I am the light of the world..." (John 8:12), "... I know whence I came..." (John 8:14), "... I am from above..." (John 8:23), "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day..." (John

8:56), "... Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). It was partly these lightning flashes that he threw into their prejudice-darkened minds that disclosed him as the One who had heard from God (John 8:40).

In the main, John builds his case for the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth upon seven selected episodes (or signs) and two outstanding conversations. His talk with the woman at the well was one of these.

### **Seven Signs and Two Conversations**

To mention them briefly, the signs commence with the turning of water into wine at the marriage feast (John 2:1-11). Next came the challenge to the desecrators of the Temple and their expulsion along with all their wares (John 2:13-24; cf. Psa. 69:9). Thirdly, Jesus healed the Nobleman's son in Capernaum. How else was the gap between the speaker and the sufferer bridged if not by a higher Power? Was not that a testimony to his Messiahship?

These were followed by the cure of the chronic paralytic (John 5:5) who had suffered no less than thirty-eight years. Jesus healed him on the Sabbath. This arresting miracle set in motion the chain of events which brought about his death (cf. John 5:18; John 7:1; John 10:31).

The fifth "sign" was the multiplication of fish and bread so as to feed five thousand followers. This event fostered the cross-currents of opinion which, as we find in the sixth chapter, ended in many following no more after him (John 6:66).

Next came the healing of the man born blind (John 9:1-40). The miracle was followed by Jesus' claim to be the Shepherd of the flock (John 10:1-16). Such an act had never before been seen in Israel; but what did that matter to the tradition ridden sticklers in Jerusalem! To them it was better that a hundred born-blind sufferers should remain blind than that one should gain the gift of sight on a Sabbath!

The most astounding of the signs was the raising of Lazarus from the dead. In the sight of friends (John 11:46) Lazarus was called forth from death (John 11:43).

In these seven selected signs John set forth the evidences of Jesus' power, each one higher in the scale of the miraculous, culminating in the unprecedented display at the open tomb. This crescendo of testimony pointed to one unchallengeable conclusion: "...these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31).

Added to the signs was the testimony of many conversations, two of which particularly suited John's purpose. The first was with Nicodemus. To his consternation Jesus listed various prerequisites to entering the kingdom of God: and these he spoke to a pious Rabbi in Israel! Here was food for John's disciple band in those later days that would give them much to think upon. Again, these words ought to lead to only one conclusion: that Jesus was the Christ.

Having touched briefly upon the massive weight of testimony which John presents in his Gospel we are in a better position to review Jesus' conversation at the well, and the importance that John placed upon it. "And he must needs go through Samaria" (John 4:4). An overruling providence guided his steps to that hallowed spot. Something was going to occur which was of more than local interest. The partner in this conversation was a woman—a Samaritan woman at that -- but his

conversation was for the benefit of his disciples and for those who would claim the God of heaven as their "Father" in the continuing course of time.

Three prominent teachings are found in this conversation:

1. Jesus possessed living water to give to those who would ask.
2. The Father sought worshipers who would worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23).
3. "*I that speak unto thee am he*" (John 4:26) -- a statement of unprecedented directness in all his statements.

Who would have made such statements without having learned them from God?

John was looking back from the maturity of old age. He was the last witness of Jesus' earthly ministry and he had gathered this collection of evidence to present, as certainly as he could, the facts that Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ of Israel, that his resurrection from the dead showed him to be the Son of God, and that his rejection by men did not detract from those two facts.

The Apostle had witnessed crowds come and then fall away. In years gone by "*thousands of Jews ... zealous of the Law*" (Acts 21:20) had believed and crowded the early Christian church. But many had fallen back into unbelief, becoming even more hostile towards the Gospel than at the first. He watched as Israel hardened its attitude toward Jesus (cf. Matt. 19:8; Mark 10:5). He had watched his kinsmen battle against mighty Rome, mourning as besieging armies encamped around Jerusalem; he had known the cities' streets to run deep with the blood of thousands as they went to their gory deaths; he witnessed the flames lick at the Temple of the living God; he had watched her stones cast down, exposing the very foundations of the Temple with priest and Levite crushed beneath. These were the death pangs of an Age-the death throes of the nation once accepted as the people of Jehovah.

Such travails were not all that he had experienced, not all that colored the story he was to write. Thousands of his brethren had been sent to the flames or to the hungry beasts by that animal Nero. He recalled the stone-fastness of those who withdrew from Jerusalem to Perea before that doomed city fell-a signal act of God to save his own. John had outlived all the other eleven. They had all completed their courses in death and he was, perhaps, the last who had seen the Man of Nazareth in the flesh.

John had lived into the darkest era of the Christian church-an era of which we know less than any other. It was a period of historical silence which followed one of life and activity. Of this period Neander (a Jewish-Christian historian) says, "we have no information, nor can the total want of sources for this part of Church history be at all surprising." Dean Farrar says,

"When with the last word in the Acts of the Apostles we lose the graphic and faithful guidance of St. Luke, the torch of Christian history is for a time abruptly quenched. We are left to grope among the windings of the Catacombs ... It is probably that this silence is in itself the result of the terrible scenes in which the Apostles perished."

Thirty years lay between Jerusalem's fall and the close of the first century. They are the darkest years of all the Christian centuries. In their midst stands one lone, venerable figure battling with the hosts of darkness which were working so hard to seduce the depleted remnant of bewildered believers constituting the Christian church.

That generation witnessed the terrible visitation upon Jerusalem, yet the longed for kingdom had not come! A time of trouble such as had never before been known had overwhelmed them, yet no Michael stood up to bring them relief. There had not been an awakening from the dead as Daniel seemed to imply. What did it all mean? Had the hand of the Lord failed its task of setting righteousness to flourish in the earth?

We have at least one source of information covering this period of time: through it we can read church history between the lines. That source is the three epistles of John. Here we detect evidence that Alexandrian philosophers had invaded the little company. Some sought to wipe "sin" from the slate of their minds; others sought to prove that Jesus (in the flesh) was not the Christ; that his sacrifice did not bring "propitiation" for sin.

One man was the sole bulwark against this tide of negative teaching and denial. Among those who may have known the Man of Nazareth, John stood in a unique and unparalleled position, bearing a great responsibility towards the saints.

It is he -- this lonely patriarch -- who turned memories' pages back and took from its archives the few facts he wanted to demonstrate that the Lord and Master of his youthful heart had been the Christ of Israel and the Son of God. And amid these scenes of confusion an attitude of worship was needed. When one's landmarks have been obscured and there seems no way by which to take one's bearings it is easy to lose contact with the higher things -- the things of God. Having been taught that once the visitation of wrath began, that same generation would not pass away till all was fulfilled, the whole company of believers could well have been excused if after the destruction of Jerusalem they began to ask if the work of God had failed.

To meet such questions John turned to the episode at the well. Here he recalls Jesus' prophecy about the time when the special privilege of Jerusalem (as the city of God) and of the Temple (as the exclusive place of worship) would be withdrawn. At that time the God of heaven, the Father of a wider family, would still be seeking worshipers -- those who would worship in spirit and in truth. He would accept their devotion as a sweet incense because it was the sincere expression of their hearts. Ceremony and ritual would then cease, but fervent adoration and praise would rise to heaven from the sacrifices of God's free born sons throughout the world. Of the old ways John's heart was tired; the deeper worship he would rather seek,

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We too live in an expiring age. We are beholding the death throes of a civilization. Some of our expectations have miscarried, at least in point of time. We need the assurances and consolations of that lone bulwark to direct our minds to the most important things so that we may be found among those whom God seeks to draw near to him in devotion, worship, and praise. As John persuaded his contemporary brethren through the words of Jesus so he also persuades us to turn from our perplexity to these devotional experiences which have encouraged so many hearts.

- T. Holmes, England

## God Seeketh Such - Part 2

*"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshipers." - John 4:23, R.V*

We return to the suggestion with which we ended the last article: John chose the incident at the well in order to persuade the younger generation (those contemporary with his old age) that Jesus was the Christ. This incident is important because it so powerfully illustrates the need to maintain a sincere, unfeigned reverence towards God. John leads his readers just as subtly as Jesus led the Samaritan woman towards that lofty height. With these preliminaries in mind, let us look directly at the story.

Jesus was withdrawing from Judea. He had exasperated the authorities during his recent Jerusalem visit and lest he parade his successes too persistently he turned his face towards Galilee. *"He must needs pass through Samaria"* (John 4:4). These words could not refer just to the geographical considerations. There was another route that Jesus could have taken and had he been as other Jews he would have preferred that alternate route to the one taken. He could have crossed eastward over the Jordan and skirted Samaria as he traveled north, crossing the river again between Samaria's northern boundary and the Sea of Galilee. This was the usual route for Jews.

Because the Samaritans were ritually unclean, the self-respecting Jew would not have chanced having themselves defiled -- even though the route was shorter. The "needs be" of the shorter route does not seem to have arisen because of any urgency to reach Galilee either. This is shown by the delay of two days (after the conversation at the well) before continuing their journey. It was during this time that he persuaded the Samaritans to believe that he was not only the Messiah of Israel, but that he was also the Savior of the world. It seems more likely that the need to travel this route had been the result of Providence, enabling him to sow this seed along the Gentile wayside, a seed which in later days would yield fruit to the Father's praise (cf. Acts 8:4-8).

By midday Jesus and his disciples had traveled some ten miles inside Samaritan territory, and about twenty miles from the point on the river's bank where he had been preaching. This was quite some distance to have covered by the middle of the day. Jesus sat down here, perhaps in the shade beneath a stand of trees, sending the rest of the band into the city to buy food. We notice in this seemingly insignificant detail something about the physical condition of Jesus. His disciples had made the same trip. Were they not weary also? Could they not just as well have benefited by the rest? Or did they have more stamina than the Master and were they slower to tire. If Jesus were the perfect man that Scripture states, why did the trip weary him before it had the same affect upon them?

We cannot help but wonder if it was just the trip which had taken its toll. In his daily ministry the Master had been involved with healing and each miracle expended more of his energy. The disciples had walked with him but they had not participated in the healings as had he (Luke 6:19). So sensitive was he that even when thronged by a crowd the act of faith on the part of a single person could draw upon his power. *"Who touched my clothes..."* he said as recorded by Mark (Mark 5:30) *"immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him."* He could tell that power had passed and he was conscious of the drain within himself.

There are modern day similarities -- inferior by degree perhaps -- to which we can look to determine whether this could transpire. When we consider contemporary practitioners of healing

arts -- whether by massage or otherwise -- we find that it costs them, too, to impart their vitality to the sufferer. We are not surprised, then, to find that it could cost Jesus to heal others. Matthew said it like this, *"himself took our infirmities and bare our diseases,"* (Matt. 8:17) when he borrowed from Isaiah's vision of Messiah in prophecy. (cf. Isa. 53:4)

We need not be surprised then by the weariness that he felt. Even in his rest we find him eager and willing to hear the call of duty which only too quickly pressed upon him, first in the form of one person and later in that of a multitude. What an inspiring morsel is our Master's behavior in this situation. Any who have been spent and wearied in the Lord's service have learned that "rest" is not "rust." Sometimes, rest is an investment for another day! Such service is joy, when it is undertaken for his dear name and for those whom he loves. It is good to be touched with the feeling of his weariness!

Reclining in the noonday sun, his rest is broken by footsteps., A woman with her water-pot at midday? Why was this? Honorable mothers and virtuous young girls would come at the break of day or wait until the cooler hours when the sun had sunk to rest. Only the ostracized and outcasts would come under the heat of day.

The water-seeker was a woman -- a Samaritan woman at that. By that day's standards of morality her very presence at the well under these circumstances cast her character in doubt. However, Jesus did not hesitate to ask of her a favor. The Master's dress and accent would immediately have marked him as a Jew. But regaining some poise from his kindly voice and perhaps with a note of scorn as was common between Jew and Samaritan, she pertly said, *"How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria"* (John 4:9)? Ignoring both her accent of the words "woman" and "Samaria" and the scornfulness of her voice, Jesus overlooked her argumentative stance. He said in serious, friendly tones: *"If thou knewest- the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water"* (John 4:10).

### **The Gift of God**

In that sun-drenched land that was the *cry* of the peddling water-carrier as he bore his precious burden through the streets! Sparkling water from the living spring was the gift of God!

Jesus had a deeper meaning in his words than merely referring to that "aqua pura" to be found in the well. Continuing, he said, *"...if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."* The woman did not understand and she taunted him,

"Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle" (John 4:11,12)

It was as if she were challenging him. If the water was good enough for Father Jacob and his family, ought it not to be good enough for him? Where could he obtain better water than this?

Jesus lifts the subject of this conversation above the water in the well, assuring her, *"Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again, but ... [it] shall be ... a well of water springing up into everlasting life"* (John 4:13). Still not understanding but subdued by the word and manner of this unusual stranger, the woman asked if he would give her such a supply so that she need not return continually to draw (John 4:15).

Had she been a Jewess with access to the books of the Prophets she might have readily understood this reference to *living water*. Isaiah (Isa. 12:3; Isa. 44:3), Jeremiah (Jer. 2:13), and Zechariah (Zech. 13:1; Zech. 14:8) all taught that "living water" simply meant, "water of refreshing" from God, showers and streams of blessing from his hand -- not the mere liquid compound gushing from the well. By a few earnest, directly spoken words Jesus had subdued her *flippant* heart and began the creation of something nearer respect and expectation than had ever dwelt in her before.

To lead her deeper Jesus suggested that she call her husband (vs. 16). We ought not to think that Jesus said this merely to remedy the impropriety of two strangers speaking at the well. No, we find rather that it was his means to shine the spotlight of truth into the depths of her heart. Jesus would lead her to the point at which he could fulfill her request for "that water." The man at home (who was not her husband) was the trouble spot of her life. A change must be made there before he could ever bestow the "water" that he had to give.

She responded candidly to his request, admitting that the man there was not her husband. And when she did Jesus said, *"Thou hast well said, I have no husband: For thou has had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: in that saidst thou truly"* (John 4:17,18). She had much that she might rather hide but in his presence she could neither evade nor hide the truth -- though this was only the truth in the legalistic sense. The Master's words were startling in the extreme, coming from a stranger: *"Thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband."* How did this stranger know these things about her? Was he a prophet? These words were too much for her. The stranger's insight searched the depths of her heart and life revealing its hidden sin.

As John retold this story to his converts in those later days is it not likely that the unspoken question on his lips might have been, "Was not this man the Christ?" Who except for the Christ could strip the soul of its secrets and pretenses, laying bare all sin?

His probing wounded the woman. Deftly, she attempted to divert the focus of this conversation to something less personal. She asked about the time-worn controversy between Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim: Which was the place where men should worship God? On new ground, her use of the phrases "ye say" and "we say" are like the thrust and parry of a threadbare soul. *"Our fathers worshiped in this mountain..."* (John 4:20), therefore "we say" it is right for us to do the same, but "ye say" that Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Was this merely a trick to side-track the probe and to ease the sting in her heart, or was it desperation's last throw? Could she hope to argue that eternal question with such a man?

Jesus did not share the normal "Jewish" interest in this question. Had he been interested he might have merely commented that the Samaritans did not know what it was that they were worshiping, but that the Jews were well informed about the object of their worship. No. With a clearer insight than common men possessed, he pressed his challenger further. Jerusalem had enjoyed an indisputable privilege. But that privilege was not to continue indefinitely, for *"...the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father"* (John 4:20,21) in that exclusive sense. An hour was to come when the true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and in truth. That was the worship that God wanted. *"God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth"* (John 4:24).

The conversation had reached its pinnacle. All the threadbare Jewish/Samaritan arguments were hereby discounted. The woman recognized that this stranger had taken her well beyond her depth

and so she tried, again, to turn the conversation around on him. ' *I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things*' (John 4:25). Here presumably she felt on safer ground. Although she lacked the Jewish prophetic insight, she had been taught to expect -- based upon the Decalogue alone -- the advent of him whom the Samaritans called "the Revealer." Hence, feeling out-reasoned by this deep-sighted Jew, she comforted herself by the assurance that when he whom they, like Israel, called "the Messiah" would come he would explain and educate them in all the deep mysteries of God. Presumably she wanted him to know that when Messiah did come the Samaritans would welcome him as warmly as would the Jews -- a fact that the events of the two days following would prove.

In Jesus' next words he departs from the normal style of his ministry. An approving reply, a statement in calm and measured tones, fell from his lips: "*I that speak to thee am he*" (John 4:26). At other times he forbade his disciples to declare even to the Jews that he was the one who was to come (cf. Matt. 16:20; Matt. 17:9). Here he declares the same openly, and to a Samaritan woman of questionable character.

We may assume from later comments that he not only declared himself here in private to the woman, but that he also declared himself to the Samaritan people. When he prepared to leave them (John 4:40-43) they confessed their belief not only that he was the Christ but also that he would be the Savior of the world. Yes, when "Messiah" came to that village he told them all things necessary to understand how the salvation of the world would come.

That Samaritan city was greatly honored, honored because an outcast woman went to a well at an unusual time of day! And he "must needs go through Samaria" to be there also at that same time of day! What better testimony that there is a divinity to shape the ends "rough hew them how we may."

### **John's Purpose?**

What is there in this story to account for John's including it in his Gospel? Does it press the disciple's claims that his beloved Lord was the Messiah of Israel? Are we left to suppose that merely reciting the story would be sufficient proof to a later generation that Jesus was the Christ?

We are inclined to think that the proof lies elsewhere, that the repetition of Jesus' words would serve only as evidence when other facts had proven the claim. These we find in the content of Jesus words. He offered three facts relative to nature and the Work of God which no one could determine solely on the base of intellect or discovery. These three were things that Jesus learned only from God. They are compounded by two additional facts relative to the "times and seasons" of the Father's plan which were not due to be fulfilled until Christ himself should come.

The first three facts are:

1. God, in himself, was essentially a spirit being.
2. God, from henceforth, was revealing himself as a "Father" towards "Sons."
3. The Almighty God of the Patriarchs was about to cross racial bounds, opening the search for worshipers to those from outside the ancient race.

These are points of fact dealing with the essential being of God himself. They could not be deduced. Nor could they be inferred. Only one who had dwelt *"in the bosom of the Father"* (John 1:18) could have made such declarations. That the God of Israel was one, and that he was possessed of many moral qualities had been made known to the Prophets of Israel. But none of the Prophets had been shown his essential being, his spirit entity. To Moses he had "back parts" and "hands" (Exod. 33:23). To Isaiah he had a "train" (or skirts) (Isa. 6:1). To other prophets he had "eyes" and "heart" and many properties usually attributed to man and likely to produce the impressions that he was in some sense, a super-sentient archetype to man.

It was the particular prerogative of the Man of Nazareth to disclose the fact that man, on earth, could neither understand the nature of the Divine, nor look upon it to see if it had shape or parts. To have life in himself (John 5:26) is just one brief but inscrutable statement by which Jesus declared "something" that he "had," yet even that could not tell us what he "was." "God is a spirit" -- that means that he is not a man -- and that is as far as the finite mind can reach. Beyond we cannot understand. Yet Jesus *knew* what God was, by long experience during his exalted pre-human days.

Men had called the Omnipotent their "Father." There are only a few oblique references (speaking only from the stand point of future events) to the Fatherhood of God (cf. Isa. 43:6; Jer. 31:9; Hosea 1:10). Prior to the Flood he was *"EL"* or *"Elohe,"* the great Creator; to Melchizedek he was *"El Elyon,"* the Most High God (Gen. 14:18,19); to Abraham he was *"El Shaddai,"* God Almighty (Gen. 17: 1); to Israel he was *"Yahweh,"* Jehovah (Exod. 6:31); to Isaiah he was "the Lord of Hosts" (Isa. 6:3); but to none save that wonderful Stranger at the well had he become known as "Father," and he alone had been acknowledged as the Son.

Previously, men sought to placate gods with sacrifices. Even Israel went up to Jerusalem to find their God. Never before during the long reign of sin had God set out to be the seeker of men, as now! Hereafter, the eyes of the Lord would run throughout the earth to seek and accept men of faith as his sons and receive the devotion of their hearts as sweet incense.

Jesus' wisdom exceeded even these truths. He evidences an understanding of God's plan on a scale previously unknown. This is summarized in two further points:

1. An hour had been arranged in the divine program when a change would occur -- *"The hour cometh and now is when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship."*
2. That hour had already dawned -- *"...the hour cometh and now is when true worshipers shall worship...";* he himself being the first to receive that opportunity.

Because he understood these facts about the relationship between God and believers he could bear the testimony which the Christ was intended to bear (cf. Isa. 61:1-3). Thus he also demonstrated himself to be the One sent of God. He alone, in all the world, had been entrusted with the secret of these mysteries of God, and thus by his illuminating words, as well as by his healing works, he could afford proof that he was the Christ, the Son of God.

-T. Holmes, England

## God Seeketh Such - Part 3

*"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshipers." - John 4:23, R. V*

Our last discussion about the woman at the well ended with a treatment of the elevating thoughts to which our Lord had led this passing stranger. They were the personality and purpose of Almighty God and the devotion and unfeigned reverence that is due him from all who are reconciled to him by his son.

There is much which cannot be said about the personality of God. There must be that gulf -- impassable, incomprehensible -- between the finite and the infinite. But enough of his purposes are revealed to awaken a devotional response in appreciative hearts. On the strength of the Lord's words we are assured that it is just this sincere response which a gracious loving Father "seeks" in those who claim to love his name.

Mark the expression, *"the Father seeketh,"* and note the emphasizing of it by our Lord. It is as though God were coming out of his long retirement, into which he withdrew when sin came into this world, so that he might begin a search for pious hearts that could be transformed as golden altars before him. From these an incense far sweeter than cassia and myrrh would arise before his face. Like the ultimate parent, God has become the "seeker" of that little "something" which a loving child might have to "give." There is more pleasure to him in our acquiring and learning to exercise that spirit of worship than in any acquisition which we can attain in this present life.

This woman at the well, lacking all previous instruction in things of God, could not be expected to comprehend all that Jesus implied. He did not hesitate, this fact notwithstanding, to tell her the truth, the whole truth, of that marvelous theme and to show how profound devotion to God was to be considered the pinnacle of all Christian experience: at once the most desired by God and the most satisfactory to his true children.

These words, spoken first to an uncomprehending mind, were not lost. By some means they were communicated to John and they were stored as a rare treasure in his godly mind until, in his mature old age, he needed them as evidence of his Master's true Messiahship.

Jesus threw full weight upon the importance of a worshipful response to a Father's love. John sought to re-emphasize the same thing in his later days. Shall we also not do the same? At the risk of repetition we say again: John insisted that the fervent response of our hearts is the one object of the Father's search among the sons of men. First, God calls "men." Then he seeks and nurtures their worship, the devotion of their hearts. In that devotion he takes supreme delight. On the weight of our Master's words, and without contradicting any other Scriptures, we find that it is on the heart that the blessing of the Lord rests, not on the head.

Truly, God gives his truth to illumine our minds. But it is not the range of our understanding or the clarity of our comprehension which alone can win us full approval from God. We may have been blessed with these and yet fail to use them to his praise. On the contrary side, equipped with devotion to God, even the most meager understanding can be effectively used to his glory.

Extensive knowledge may seem important to some who by birth possess a keener, more analytical mind. Knowledge can never be allowed to be considered an end in itself. If knowledge draws us into the mind and personality of God, it has been used well. But we know that it is not

just intellectuality which pleases him, else he would not have chosen the weak, the outcast, and the things that are not considered suitable in this world to be his own (1 Cor. 1:26-29). Knowledge dare never be discounted, but neither should it be elevated above its importance. It is the response of the heart that is the most desired by God.

How does a person develop this state of heart? Let us note the words of Jesus.

Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:21-24).

Three ideas in these verses call for special notice and several words as well. The ideas are these: an old worship, a new worship, and the object of that worship. The words which are used in the emphatic sense in that passage are these: "now," "and now is," "true," "the true worshipers," "must," and "must worship him."

Jesus had little to say about the Samaritan system of worship. Their worship was offered in ignorance and was misdirected in purpose. It had not been instituted by God and had not been accepted by him. At its best it was merely a caricature of worship: it had as its foundation nothing more than an incomplete copy of the Pentateuch and for priestly service there were forms instituted by an unfaithful priest whom Israel had expelled from Jerusalem (Neh. 13:28). The Samaritans claimed to descend from Jacob, but even this arose from the inter-marriage of renegade Jews with a race that had been introduced by the king of Assyria into the vacant land (cf. 2 Kings 17:33-41). A considerable amount of intermarriage had occurred during the years between the return from Babylon and Nehemiah's purge. "*Ye worship ye know not what...*" was a just assessment of their position before the Most High. Jesus did not say they were better to worship in ignorance than not to worship at all! That was not true, even for those rudimentary times.

Jesus had one commendatory thing to say about the Jewish worship -- it was performed with a degree of understanding. Note his words, "*Salvation is of the Jews.*" That is not to be understood that the average Jew understood the full implication of that statement, but that some of the visionary prophets had foretold the coming salvation -- one not only for the Jews but through the Jews of whom Jesus spoke. This was the salvation which led the Samaritan people to believe on Jesus as the "*Savior of the world...*" (John 4:42). The word used by Jesus is *ek* and this word not only means "of" but "out of." In this case it is the equivalent of our word "through." Jesus' words, then, mean that the salvation which first embraced the Jews flows out from them until it embraces all the world. The Prophets spoke repeatedly of this, knowing that God would yet honor his pledge to Abraham, and bless all the nations through his seed.

The obvious point of Jesus' words was that Jewish worship was based upon an interim stage of God's plan, and that it was founded upon clear, precise revelation from God. Their instruction came from more than a mutilated copy of the Decalogue. And with each successive prophet the people's understanding was carried to new horizons other than that of the Samaritan. Consequently, their worship was associated with God's plan for the redemption of the whole world, even though it was in an elementary form. Thus, the old worship at Jerusalem was not pointless. It illustrated a far greater purpose to be disclosed in the ages to come.

Other Scriptures taught man that an animal sacrifice was ineffective at removing sin. A change of procedure was proposed by the Scriptures, therefore, which would accomplish this end. A new and better Covenant had been announced under which a "people for a purpose" will be realized. In this way a people who had failed to attain to its call under the Mosaic system in the former days, would achieve its destiny of becoming the channel of grace on earth to all the nations of the world. But before that fuller destiny could be achieved, another phase of God's plan would come into operation. All true worshipers would first have the opportunity of worshiping God in spirit and in truth.

To put our appreciation into perspective let us consider the word "truth" as used here with an earlier statement of John. *"The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ"* (John 1:17). Was there no truth in the world before Jesus' advent? Was everything which preceded him labeled as "false?" And did John set the truth as it came by Jesus against all that was supposedly false? The answer to this can only be an emphatic NO!

The Mosaic system was ordained by God. It rested on his authority and operated under his sanction. It was God who had spoken to the prophets, and through them to the fathers. Bearing, thus, the imprint of the Divine it could not be a false system. There must be another similar sense in which this word "truth" can be understood which does not conflict with the balance of Scripture. What is true about that old system is that it consisted of pictures and symbols -- not the real things -- and hence could not bring salvation to men. The ceremonies and the performers under it pictured the sacrifice of the Lamb of God that would, at a later date, signal the *"Savior of the world."* The Law was shadowy; the grace and truth system that came by Jesus was real, advanced, and has only minimal ritual. That former system did fulfill its purpose of educating the pious sons of Israel in the rudiments of holiness, righteousness, and purity.

Just as in this former text (John 1:17), the word "truth" in our text stands for that which is "real" and "substantial." It is related to the things by which actual redemption would be effected. The "true" worshipers are those who worship in the spirit of that redemptive plan.

John said that Jesus was filled with grace and truth. Of course, Jesus always spoke the truth. But whether speaking or silent Jesus was the truth. He was the Lamb of God whom God had determined to sacrifice before he laid the foundations of the world (Eph. 1:4) in order to take away the sins of the world (I John 2:2). He was the truth because he was actually the Savior of men. He came as the substitutionary sacrifice to replace those inferior sacrifices that had served as illustrations of his work.

The "new" worship must be associated with the "real" things of God. It does not belong to the former rituals or elementary ideas. If it did its worshipers would be no more true worshipers than Aaron's sons or Israel's citizens had been. The "old" has been sensory, external, and of the hand; the "new" must be spiritual, internal, and of the heart. Jehovah-worship had been limited by time and place. Father-worship must be universal and continual. No Jerusalem or Gerizim were necessary, nor were priests, acolytes, attendants, or rites. This worship sprung from the depths of the heart, expressing its approval of God's hand in its affairs and its devotion to him. Such worship will contribute toward the world's salvation -- as did the Mosaic system before -- but on a real and superior plane.

## Why Must It Be So?

Simplistically one could answer that question by saying that it is that way in which God has now expanded the revelation of himself. His is now to be the Father to a race of children; an ever present manifest spirit to his worshipers.

But what does being a spirit mean? Is he formless, impersonal, and ethereal? No. He is represented as having a location, for Jesus went to sit at his right hand (Heb. 1:3). Angels enter and leave his presence. Jesus in his exaltation became the "*brightness [fullness] of his glory, and the express image of his person*" and so he has both form and substance. We do not need to waste time reminding any that spirits (on any plane) do not resemble men. There are some indications as to what spirit beings *are not*. They have no flesh or bones (Luke 24:39; 1 Cor. 15:50). But there is precious little evidence to show what they *are*. Perhaps the poet Milton expresses all that we can say with confidence:

For spirits as they please  
Can either sex assume, or both, so soft  
And uncompounded is their essence pure;  
Nor tied or manacled with joint or limb  
Nor founded on the brittle strength of bones,  
Like cumbrous flesh; but in the shape they choose  
Dilated or condensed, bright or obscure  
Can execute their airy purposes.

The truth is that we cannot understand the qualities of a spirit being. That being so, what is there left to say of the highest of spirit Beings, God himself?

## "God is Spirit"

That is what the Greek text says. But Jesus spoke of his Father from the standpoint of personality. He goes on to say that they must worship him (John 4:24). The thought of personality here is not the dominant thought. It is the idea of personality expressing itself in predetermined activity, drawing lesser personalities to the realm of its own existence. The Greek word *pneuma* means, primarily, "wind," and by extension "breath." Atmospheric air is neither "wind" nor "breath" when it is not in motion. Arising from this simple thought, we begin to understand the idea of divine activity working out its plans.

Behind this idea of divine personality, thus expressed, we see also that personality expressing itself by what it does.

Who would think of their Father as a sleeping hunk? On the greater scale, who would think of God as of some sleeping Buddha or of an unheeding Baal. Christians certainly cannot; to them he is the Most High, the high and lofty One (Isa. 57:15) who is expressing himself in all the activities associated with his plan of salvation.

It is salvation which runs like a scarlet thread through the words at the well and through the conversations with the Samaritans. Salvation would be accomplished; embracing first the Jew and later all the world. That Jesus had enlarged upon this theme from the smattering presented to this one woman is evident by the Samaritans affirmation (John 4:42). At the beginning of his stay with them they knew him by his confession to be the Christ. By the end of his brief space with them they recognized him also as the Savior of the world.

This is the purpose of God's activity among men. With the ancient people gathered, restored, and made the nucleus of the new government of earth, all the earth (cf. Psa. 59:13; 67:7; Isa. 41:5; 45:22) will look to Israel's God, and through Israel's king they will find life, peace, and happiness.

This is the scope of the Divine's activity among men: he is holy, just and good; he is engaged in a plan of redemption with his son Jesus at its center; that plan of salvation is to be offered to "whosoever will" (Rev. 22:17) of all "the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3; 28:14).

Just as God expressed himself through action, so those who come into contact with this great directive force shall also be drawn into the sphere of his activity. At this time we still understand his plans only partially (1 Cor. 13:9), but they are so broad that they attract all those who are inclined towards God. Like the flower which turns its face towards the sun, so those hearts which turn to God are energized by his "spirit" until they become dominated and controlled by him. The depths of their personalities are altered by his magnetism, and eventually life for them becomes submission to his will.

This is the "real" work of God, and his children worship him because of it -- in their spirits, truly. Before them lies the sublime -- constantly a source of inspiration to their full surrender to his plans. The memory of his greatness and mercy tunes the music of their hearts to the heavenly chorus. No tricks, no lofty dome, nor artifice of man is required to sing the music of their soul. He alone awakens their blessing and their praise.

Such the Father seeks. As the Creator he might properly demand these works. Were he a dictator his court might be ordered to extol his excellence. But the loving Father chooses instead to win the affection of his children by nurturing in their hearts the love of his purposes. He seeks their worship by what he does, what he is accomplishing in and for them -- and for all mankind. In return they surrender in cooperation, finding that true and spiritual worship which pleases God.

- T. Holmes, England

## **God Seeketh Such - Part 4**

*"The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for such doth the Father seek to be his worshipers." - John 4:23, R.V*

We finished our last discussion upon the thought that our worship was expressed by our full submission to the will of God. By that submission, which had been obtained by appreciating his purposes among men, we were entering into a measure of cooperation with him. Our life, consecrated and yielding, is the worship that he "seeks." This gives him joy. This is truth in the widest sense.

This broad idea must somehow be brought into the commonness of our daily life. And in this closer survey of our lives we may find aspects which are not quite as satisfactory as that grand and wider view may give.

Where can we more easily express our spirit of worship than when we assemble together in the name of the Lord? If, in that sacred hour, our spirit of devotion is *cold* or formal we may be sure that it will be no less cold in the living of our daily lives. If our spirit is warm and congenial when we are mingling with our associates in the world, it must needs be just as warm in the upper room. These two circumstances are manifestations of only one fabric, and it is to be hoped that our attitudes in the meeting room are the source for the other. If we cannot manifest our devotion among others who share our feelings, how can we hope to manifest it among strangers? Thus, we may take our attitude during our periods of joint fellowship/worship as a barometer of our consecrated submission to God. If we are not moved with the conviction that he is present with us, then how can we act as though he were present at other times?

### **What Does His Presence Mean?**

A time came when we (personally) grew into a wider understanding of God's plan. That understanding opened up many of the scriptural sayings which had been shrouded in mystery. The Bible's message became clear and distinct. We took satisfaction at the harmony to be found in the Word. We found solutions to the problems which beset us. And what is more, its inspiring call to follow Jesus in a way of sacrifice won our hearts to our Father and our Lord. It seemed nothing to count all things joy (James 1:2) for the opportunity to die with him (Rom. 6:8) so that we might be glorified with him.

At that time our appreciation took on length and breadth. But has there been a corresponding height and depth? Has our heart kept pace with our head? Observing the world around us we are reluctantly persuaded that such is generally not the case.

It is easy to find extenuating circumstances to justify this condition. Our day resembles that of John, to a degree. The expectations of many have miscarried. We have passed beyond what to some were well established landmarks. We live from year to year without other guideposts upon which to rely. It is not correct (as some would suggest) that the year 1914 was accepted as the "beginning" of the "end-period." That date was presented as the termination of the gentile power. In that year many thought the kingdom was due and the return of Jewry to favor and power. Many expected that the "old world" would then pass away; the "new" beginning in its place. And how many hoped to be gathered "home" to be forever with the Lord.

But now we are pressing over uncharted territory. Landmarks seem woefully lacking; our cries, "how long," answered only by silence. Some have set subsequent dates which have come and gone; others have yet to arrive. Where once expectation was alert, uncertainty now prevails. Some of the old baggage that has been carried along the way must needs be cast off. But alas! When once the unloading has begun the difficulty is in knowing when to stop, and we would not want to jettison the good baggage along with the unfulfilled. What is "of faith" should remain even though we gladly turn from that which is only "of credulity."

John faced the same uncertainty. Silence surrounded him just as it surrounds us. And are we pointing to these circumstances for the purpose of placing blame here -- or there? God forbid. No one is to blame for expectations unfulfilled. The weakness lay in the expectation, not in the lack of fulfillment. To what purpose do we direct the spotlight of attention to these factors? In order to ask the most important of all questions:

### **Did These Experiences Deepen Our Reverence For God?**

Some may truthfully answer, Yes! But can we all say the same? History shows us that many lost faith, lost trust, lost even their first love as this time feature, or that, failed to see its fulfillment as they had expected.

As if to accentuate a critical condition there soon came a period of controversy and bitter separation. Many hearts lost their former peace and poise. Communion became difficult all around. Once again we ask the question: Did these unhappy experiences deepen our spirituality, bringing us closer to the Father? Did they promote a more careful regard for holy things?

Let us review a few of the events of those former days in greater detail. Even at the time when that activity reached its zenith in the class extension and Photo Drama work, what opportunities were presented to stress or cultivate the worship or devotional aspects of our lives? In nearly every case our witnessing was made in public lecture halls, in cinemas, in schools, and in other public buildings of a secular nature -- many of them drab and unpretentious -- without anything to spur the deeper springs of one's inner life. True, they served an evangelistic purpose -- but were they always all that they might have been? Furthermore (the object being what it was) both lecturer and assistants were bent upon convincing those who had come to "hear." Thus, at its best, the atmosphere of the lecture hall or the debating room tended to prevail.

This is not adverse criticism of those days. Far from it, we only wish to notice that this impact of mind upon mind -- of reasoned argument upon reasoning minds did not always stir the appreciation of the heart towards God and the deeper aspects of truth.

Again, how many times did those little classes have to meet (from sheer necessity) in little dingy rooms with nothing but secular associations all around. Larger cities with more people to draw from were sometimes luckier. They may have had more convenient surroundings, but in the aggregate the assembly hall atmosphere was not conducive to a reverential attitude of mind.

Such disadvantages might have been overcome had all elders and speakers been possessed of deep devotion and piety themselves. But were all who ministered among the flock so blessed? Add to this the range of truth to be absorbed; and with such poor, slow minds to take it in. Is it any wonder that our seasons of communing came to take on somewhat of the nature of a "school" or "class" (as they have so often been called), in which instruction was given by those "quick to understand" to those not so amply blessed. Nor need we wonder if a hunger for fresh new thoughts took possession of many minds, crowding out the deeper purpose which always ought to

characterize our communion in his name. That it has taken many years to realize that the first purpose of gathering should be to worship God -- to give praise and thanks to his holy name -- is readily understandable under the circumstances. It has been this way with every advance of the truth, and our own experience has been no exception to the rule of history.

Of course, we sang our hymns, and prayer was duly made in the course of our study or service. But how often did the whole company sense and react to his unseen presence in their midst? Did we pray to our Father in heaven and then act as though he actually was there -- a million miles away! Did we always think we were drawing near to an immediate throne of Grace, from which an all-seeing Eye -- like some Shekinah Light -- was noting all we did and said? To some this may seem merely imaginative sentimentalism. This concept of the unseen Presence is not apparent to the coldly critical, rational mind. Only the responsive "eye of faith" can sense "Him who is invisible." Perhaps because our communion belonged more to the plane of the reasoning mind than to that of "faith," we were not always sure if we had worshiped God in the manner due his holy Name, or had merely been "at the class." Perhaps if the eye of faith had been more evident we would have acted differently.

We have sought to excuse the lack of reverential attitude upon the basis of sound reason. But in all sincerity we believe the time has come when our religious life (or should we say spiritual life) should take on as much height and depth as it has already taken in length and breadth. Can we hope less than that our God consciousness should equal our truth consciousness. Every reform movement has started with some expansion of accepted truth. Thus it lead to a wider outlook. The need for a depth of experience to correspond to this outlook only came at a later date. It is as though the human heart needs longer to mature than the mind. One wonders if we ought not by now to have reached the stage where depth of experience should balance breadth of understanding.

### **How To Achieve Balance**

Depth of experience has two prerequisites:

1. an increased time in private with God,
2. an increased reverential response in ecclesia meetings.

The first requires more than just time alone. It implies more of the "closet" mood towards God so that wherever we go, whether engaged or disengaged, we can lift our hearts to make contact with our attendant Lord and find a short season of comforting communion. This momentary lifting of our heart to him can break the stress and tension of our modern life for us anywhere at any time. This attitude induces a keener and more intense spiritual sensitivity which keeps faith and love alert and alive. It makes the presence of our Lord in our life a living, bright reality -- a help in time of need -- and is well worth trying out by every child of God.

What do the Scriptures have to suggest about the second point. Our Lord gave an illustration of how to proceed against a brother who had offended (Matt. 18:15-17). He proceeded on to say, "...*Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven*" (Matt. 18:18).

The context of this verse clearly applies to discipline in the church. The Master's language, however, suggests a much broader application. We notice the use of the words, "whatsoever,"

and, "...again I say unto you." Jesus is here making a very broad statement which continues in this vein:

"... if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:19-20).

Gathering is thus shown to be of greater importance than "disciplinary" gatherings alone. It is intended to apply to all "gatherings," duly arranged and agreed, even by so few as "two or three." The proper sense of these words implies that if "two or three" (or a larger number) agree to meet in his name at a certain hour that such is a binding agreement, duly noted in heaven. When the appointed hour is come and the attendants have assembled, the heavenly presence will also present itself "in the midst," unseen but not undetected, a partner in the "fellowship."

This promise of our Lord makes our assemblies something of exceptional note. Because we have agreed to meet and our agreement is acknowledged by God himself, the heavenly Visitor will take his rightful place among us. Perhaps our meeting will be in a drab back room -- no matter, he will be there! Perhaps we will meet in some humble home where prior to our arrival the daily life was in full swing -- never mind, he will be there. Be the room large or small, 'neath lofty dome or humble roof, his promise stands sure -- *"...there am I in the midst."*

At the appointed hour the room is transformed. It now becomes the House of God -- a heavenly Bethel. Those who arrive there expect his presence! And there will be no disappointing absence. And if our unseen Lord punctually presents himself is it complementary to our Lord for any of us to be needlessly late? Our timeliness is the first aspect of our reverence to him. A trifle, you say! Tardiness is not trivial in an audience with a king!

What of our deportment after we have arrived. Suppose that upon arriving we are reacquainted with some friend that we have not seen in years. We sit and chatter with our friend in all the small talk that the passing years have not allowed. Does the pleasure of meeting friends outweigh our expectancy of meeting with our Lord? Our cup of joy is surely full. But shall we not first remember our more distinguished Visitor who has promised to be there -- at our request? What purpose brings us together? Are we come to ponder the intricacies of intellectual understanding? Does some theme for this day pre-occupy our thoughts? Have we come to hear the talents of some notable lecturer whose ideas and style we find appealing? All these things have their place. But there remains the first reason for our assembly: to give thanks and praise to his blessed name.

In these circumstances we recognize the value of those "men of God" who may preside over our gatherings. There are those who can take from purely intellectual discussions those applications which will move our hearts to gratitude and by so doing will sprinkle sweet and pure incense upon the altar of smoldering love in our heart. At such a time the logical debater and the rabid doctrinaire seem out of place. Those who would keep the thread of argument centered on the plane of reason seem to indicate that they have either forgotten or ignored the presence of the Lord. What member of the Lord's congregation would dare push their ideas to the point of argument if they felt his piercing gaze upon them? The consciousness of his presence would dissuade any such action (John 17:19). There will always be question. The key is in how to ask them. Answers must come to each question. But the tone of the answer is often as important as the answer itself. And differences must also have their place, but with what attitude do we approach them? In a hallowed atmosphere speech and discussion take on more respectful reverence. Within that sacred hour hearts may burn as ardently as they did on the Emmaus road and departing from that place the thankfulness born of a living faith may go with all who

assembled together. No wishful thinking or sentimentality prevails here. This condition of life has been experienced by tens of thousands of saintly persons in days gone by. It is true today -- as those who put it to test can testify.

True worship arises from his never to be ignored presence in our midst and our never to be forgotten attention to the small details that are tokens of our respect for his holy Name. The assembly of believers is like a greenhouse that can nurture fragrant plants. If our communal life is what it should be, the reverential worship of God will permeate every aspect of our lives. Some have mounted a familiar plaque on the wall of their home: "Christ is the head of this house, the unseen Guest at every meal; the silent listener to every conversation." Perhaps we might do well to record at least a mental plaque for use in our assemblies with other believers: Christ is the head of this Ecclesia: the unseen Guest in all our fellowship; the silent Listener to every conversation."

Reverence is essential in our troubled times. Reverence gives spawn to poise and balance in the face of disappointment. Dispensational disappointment has dampened the enthusiasm of many hearts. With this dampening has also disappeared man's responsiveness to the Good Shepherd's care. A disturbed mind leads to a disturbed heart which in turn diminishes our reverence toward the Lord. As long as these negative influences continue to affect us many of the tokens of his abiding presence will be obscured until they become, in time, no longer expected or desired.

This sad decline begins when one forgets the Lord's promise to be in our midst while concentrating upon the definition of this text or that. Debate soon swallows worship and we must leave the presence unblessed and unhelped.

Dear brethren in the Lord, should we not be more mindful that our Heavenly Father is "seeking" us -- if we fit the description of our Master to the woman at the well. Many things belong to God by virtue of his creative right, these need not be sought. There are many living hearts whom God is not now seeking -- they are steeped in sin and degradation (Rom. 8:20). The time will come when he will seek and exalt all who will have been found (Phil. 3:9). But that search will complete the assembly of his Elect. What he displays to all then will be conditioned upon what he finds in believers today. Today, we are told that he seeks such as can and do worship him in spirit and truth.

Yes, the disciple whom Jesus loved had the right word for us, today:

*"God seeketh such..."*

- T. Holmes, England

## **I Am With You**

Jesus whispers I am with you  
For the battle every day;  
Standing by you in the conflict,  
Going with you all the way.

Jesus whispers I am with you  
In the hour of deepest need;  
When the way is dark and lonesome  
I am with you, I will lead.

Jesus Whispers I am with you  
In the sunshine, in the cloud;  
When the spirit is exalted,  
When the stricken heart is bowed

I am with you, I am with you,  
Jesus whispers sweet and low;  
In the sunlight, in the shadow,  
I am with you where'er you go.

## **Great Hindrances to Prayer**

Satan sentinels the gateway of prayer. Andrew Bonar has left it on record that he never entered into a season of pure prayer without a fierce battle at the threshold. Satan dreads nothing like prayer. He knows he cannot frighten the saints with hideous features or over come them by coarse enticement. He stands at the portals of the Holy of Holies as an "*angel of light*." He does not attack openly, he diverts. The church that lost its Christ was full of good works (Rev. 2:24). Activities are multiplied that meditation may be ousted and organizations are increased that prayer may have no chance. Souls may be lost in good words as surely as in evil ways. The one concern of Satan is to keep the saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil, mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray.

- Bible Study Monthly

## **A Word of Appreciation To Correspondents**

We take this opportunity to thank all those who have written in and who we have not been able to answer in person. We often find ourselves unable to answer every letter, and to delve into the depth of response which a letter might suggest. We ask your understanding if we don't respond just as you might have liked.

We thank those with whom we have been unable to correspond and appreciate all your support and correspondence.

## Incredible Courage and the Tale of History

*"Behold, The LORD'S hand is not so short that it cannot save; neither is his ear so dull that it cannot hear." - Isaiah 59:1, NAS*

Faithful saints... Ah, yes, there have always been some who have been faithful to God throughout the Gospel Age. They met in small groups as brethren. They held and defended basic scriptural truths. They condemned error. Many even surrendered their very lives for the defense of truth. And moreover, they were never a part of the established church systems of their day.

When attempting to discover the facts of the "case" for God's faithful our attempts are often obstructed. In part this occurs when one uses secular records to determine Christian history. By looking through the eyes of the secular historian we restrict our vision and see only the things of the flesh -- we look through the natural eyes of the historian. But the child of God is not concerned with the things of the flesh. He is concerned with the things of the spirit. And so, what is gained by such searching?

The true people of God have always been a "little flock." They will continue to be a "little flock" until that time when the establishment of Messiah's coming kingdom is decreed by the Almighty. Only then will the message of salvation be sounded to all men so clearly as to be unmistakable and so appealingly as to be irresistible. For now, the true church remains too insignificant for historians even to mention.

### Illustrating Historical Bias

Let us look at an example of the bias which fills our minds when we search secular records for the sake of learning spiritual history. Many contend that Martin Luther was one of several special messengers to the true church. Some have attempted to rank his position in history (not in merit, but in chronological order) and so doing have called him the "sixth messenger." Historians call Luther as the "father of the Reformation."

Some students of the Bible, however, have severe problems accepting such claims to special authority on the basis of Martin Luther's own words and actions. Because of his own actions many would find themselves much more sympathetic to those who were called "Anabaptists," and who were among those persecuted as a result of Luther's preaching.

We quote two incidents for your consideration. Because of their graphic subject matter we would not ordinarily print such material in our journal, but we find that they best remind us of the real issues which are at stake in a person's profession of Christianity. Contrast them. To which of these two individuals would you ascribe the true spirit of Christianity?

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Luther's belief in social order prompted him to write against the rebellious peasants in 1525 A.D.. In his first essay he chided the princes for being unjust, even though he believed the peasants had misconstrued faith. In a second essay, "Against the Robbing and Murdering Horde," Luther urged the princes to stab and kill as if mad dogs. He believed the rampant peasants had usurped the political prerogatives given by God to the established authorities. At Frankenhausen [Germany], May 15, 1525, some fifty thousand peasants were slain. (The Dictionary of Bible in Religion, Abingdon Press)

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On May 21, 1527, in the town of Rottenburg, Germany, 23 miles from Stuttgart, Michael Sattler died for the cause of Christ. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that this man's martyrdom is unique in Christian history.

Michael Sattler was one of the leaders of the Anabaptist movement which swept across Europe in the sixteenth century. To appreciate his place in history, we must first look at the spiritual episode in which he played such a heroic part. The Anabaptist revival was, essentially, a recovery of Bible-believing Christianity. It began in Switzerland in the form of Bible study groups, and from there spread throughout Europe.

These humble Christian folk were called "ana-baptists" or "re-baptisers," because they rejected the infant baptism of the state churches. Baptism, they said, should only be administered to adults upon confession of personal faith in Christ. This view, along with other convictions (both religious and political) set them on a collision course with the empire church of that day.

Other Anabaptist "peculiarities," almost too numerous to mention here, included a literal interpretation of Scripture, separation of church and state, freedom of conscience, development of Christian character, the formation of Christian communities, and a strong belief in the second coming of Christ and his millennial reign. Many of these people believed in the sleep of the dead, followed by the resurrection. Among their leaders were men who dared to question such traditional dogma as eternal torment and trinitarianism.

As the Anabaptist movement grew, Europe became alarmed. A religious conclave or "diet" was held in Speyer, Germany, in 1529, and out of it came a decree that all Anabaptists would be put to death! This decree was binding upon all the states of the so-called Holy Roman Empire, and from that date on Anabaptists and their like were hunted like animals.

For the next half century, Anabaptists perished in all the countries of Europe. It has been written that their blood flowed like water, and they cried to the Lord for help. Hundreds went to their death joyful and singing psalms. By 1546 in Holland and neighboring Friesland alone at least thirty thousand had been slain.

It was in the tumultuous context of this movement, in its very beginning, that Michael Sattler appeared. He was born at Stauffen, Germany, probably in the year 1490. He soon became a leader of the South German and Swiss Anabaptists. It was a matter of time until the authorities discovered the little flocks with which he was associated, and Michael Sattler and his wife, and others of the believers, were placed under arrest.

The spirit of the times is illustrated in the suggestion of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria that the prisoners receive "third baptism" or drowning. This was a convenient method of disposing of Anabaptists. But, in this instance, the authorities preferred a semblance of justice.

...Michael Sattler's trial was conducted at Rottenburg. It was a turbulent affair lasting about two days.... A verdict was not long in coming, and Michael Sattler was sentenced to die. First he was to be tortured, and then because he was an arch-heretic, burned at the stake. Still, as the sentence was announced, he maintained his calmness.

The terrible proceedings began at the city market place. First, his tongue was cut off, and then he was forged or framed to a wagon. Twice, then, red-hot pliers or tweezers were used to tear pieces of flesh from his body. On the way to the execution, the pliers ripped away at his flesh five more times.

When the executioner and his party arrived at the appointed spot, Michael Sattler's torn body was bound to a ladder, which was then set upright in a stack of wood arranged for the burning. But, as he stood in the midst of the fire, he gave one more demonstration of his unconquerable faith in his Savior. When the flames had burned away the ropes which bound his hands, he lifted up his forefingers. It was a prearranged sign for his family, and a farewell signal for all to see. He wanted everyone to know that, even in the flames, he had been faithful to the end. Then, the moving account says, he patiently fell asleep in the Lord.

Eight days later, Michael Sattler's wife was drowned in the Neckar River. Faithful like her husband, she received "third baptism...."

... The persecution of Michael Sattler and the others like him, was, in a very real way, a fulfillment of our Lord's prophecy in the upper room. "*...an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering a service to God. And these things they will do, because they have not known the Father, or me*" (John 16:2,3, NAS). (from *The Restitution Herald*)

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May we all learn two lessons from these excerpts. First, the cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1) to which we can refer for strength, encouragement, and inspiration did not end in the days of the apostles. We can look through history and find isolated but encouraging examples of Christianity as it was lived out in true and honest lives. Secondly, let us regard the pages of secular history with eyes opened wide to the fact that they do not provide us with a story of the world from God's viewpoint, but rather from the biased standpoint of men. Let us be careful, therefore, in what judgments we make based upon incidents which are related to us through the hearsay of secular history.

- A. Jarmola

## The Devices of the Evil One

*"For we are not ignorant of his devices." - 2 Corinthians 2:11*

[Editor's note: These words seem particularly appropriate in light of scandals which rocked organized religious circles in past years.]

The end of the Gospel age draws nearer with every passing day. The Lord's people, therefore, ought not to be surprised that if, as their hopes draw nearer, Satan's temptations become more subtle. And if one is ardent in spirit and service it should not be a surprise when the great deceiver's efforts against them are increased in proportion to one's activity as a servant of God and of his truth.

The believer has reason to take heart at the temptations of Satan. To those of faith such opposition is an opportunity to demonstrate one's faithfulness to God in steadfastness and patient endurance. It also proves to be a test of one's brotherly love towards others of the household of faith. Temptation does a sifting, a separating, work -- *"The Lord your God proveth you"* (Deut. 13:3).

One result of the pressure of such temptations is the opportunity to demonstrate (or hopefully, not to demonstrate) certain characteristics. Pressures incite anger, malice, envy, hatred, fightings, evil supposition and evil words. Many are being tempted each day along these lines and their love of righteousness consequently is being shown. *"Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them"* (Matt. 7:20). Just as thorns and briars are found in a vineyard but bear no grapes, so there are spiritual thorns and briars. These are not part of the vine, however closely associated they are with it. They do not bear the fruit of the spiritual vine and are not helpful to God's people but do injury to them. *"...the poison of asps is under their lips"* (Rom. 3:13).

We think that all will be tested along the lines of making or spreading false or slanderous remarks, even those who are meek, patient, kind to their brethren, and who demonstrate a degree of Christian love. This is so much the case that we find scriptural intimation that as the Day of the Lord progresses some will shine as examples of their Lord while others will find shame and contempt cast upon them.

We are not to suppose that the Lord's will has changed for his people. The admonitions written two thousand years ago for us to emulate the actions of his son and thus become like him are still the message for today. By doing so we deepen our appreciation for our Savior and we grow in the graces of our Lord. Our trials, then, are merely aids in making us fit for the kingdom.

Discouragement is one of Satan's tools. The more conscientious a person is in living his or her belief the more they are subject to suggestions of being unworthy of the grace of God, of having been rejected by him or condemned afresh. We must recognize that God allows Satan to make such temptations. *"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"* (Heb. 11:6). Both experience and Scripture teach us that opposition tries faith. God is seeking those whose faith is so implicit that they will be unwavering in their obedience.

## Remedying a Sad Situation

While God is seeking to build, Satan is seeking to destroy. The faith of God's elect is high on his list of demolition priorities. Sometimes he misrepresents God and his character. We find that some teach about an unloving, unjust, unkind god. On other occasions Satan works by exaggerating our weaknesses and failures. If he can discourage us from trying to please God he will have succeeded in his plan. There is only one remedy for this discouragement.

Seek the Lord in earnest prayer. Exert your will power to oppose all false suggestions about your Creator. And there is nothing as helpful along these lines as a clear and growing knowledge about the scriptural teachings respecting God's love and the abundance of his merciful provisions in Christ. Those who find themselves dejected should cast themselves fully without reservation at the foot of the cross in the spirit of complete devotion to God. Then in faith they may lay hold upon the Lord in prayer for complete deliverance from Satan's power.

Frequently, when sin lies at the door (Gen. 4:7), when one has given in to some violation of their heart's covenant with the Lord, the Adversary is most able to exercise an evil influence upon the mind of the believer. He may cause doubt. He may cause fear. He may cause us to feel alienation from God. But for all of these symptoms there is one cure: a knowledge of God's character, his great love and sympathy through the Lord Christ Jesus which he has made available to all who come to him in full devotion and dedication of their lives.

*"According to your faith be it unto you"* (Matt. 9:29). This is virtually a divine rule. Faith must triumph or else the life of joy and blessing will perish. Those who will not exercise faith will never be acceptable to the Father. They cannot be members of the kingdom class. Such must await the next age and have different experiences which will develop full obedience to God.

The Apostle John suggests for our consideration a specific course of conduct for our guidance. If we follow his words, the Adversary will be unable to touch us. *"...whosoever is [begotten] of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not"* (I John 5:18). This expression conjures up the vision of a charmed circle within which God's people live. This circle is not a fence, but merely a figurative line which we can easily cross. Inside that circle the Lord is favorable to us. We may imagine at the very center of that circle our Lord himself, the head of his church. We are encouraged to press close to him, in his Word, through his Spirit, and through his providential overruling. We are reminded of the words of the hymn to this point: "Nearer my God to thee."

Outside of this charmed circle are the powers of evil. These are sometimes allowed to touch the earthly interests of the children of light, but the evil influences are never permitted to enter the circle of care and touch the heart that has devoted itself to Christ. He is a new creature and the things of this earth no longer matter to him. The powers of evil cannot cross that line which defines the charmed circle of our fellowship. Our new life is inside this circle and as such we are spoken of as being hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3:3).

While these powers of evil cannot enter into our circle, nothing prevents the believer from being lured outside of the protection of God. How are we lured? Have we ever been tempted by hopes for a better job? Have thoughts of family and friends ever caused us to put aside spiritual pursuits? Have cares for our home and security occupied our time and mind so that the things of the spirit could find no resting place in our mind? The Adversary will use the thoughts to which we are most receptive to lure us outside the circle of God's protective care.

The lesson here is simple. *"Abide in Him"* (1 Tim. 2:28). *"Abstain from all appearance of evil"* (1 Thess. 5:22). *"Draw nigh to God"* (James 4:8). Press onward and upward, *"Take heed therefore unto yourselves"* (Acts 20:28). Forget *"...those things which are behind"* (Phil. 3:13). *"...if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live"* (Rom. 8:13). Keep close to the Master therefore, so that the wicked one does not touch you.

God is loving kindness. He is merciful toward those who live in harmony with him. We may approach that invisible line of behavior -- mentally or physically. But as we do we leave behind the protection of God and we approach our deceitful and wily foe. If we recognize that we have been overcome in such a fault, if we find that we have wandered, let us remember that there is joy in heaven over a heart which turns from sin unto righteousness.

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## **10 Things to Remember**

1. The value of time
2. The success of perseverance
3. The pleasure of work
4. The dignity of simplicity
5. The worth of character
6. The power of kindness
7. The obligation of duty
8. The influence of example
9. The wisdom of economy
10. The virtue of patience

## **Entered Into Rest**

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