

NO OTHER WAY

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FOREWORD

This book is offered to those searching for Truth in a world riddled with confused standards and written with the prayer it will hearten all to search the Scriptures, find Christ as Saviour and Lord and be encouraged to live a confident life in this troubled world because of the blessed Truth they find in the Word of God.

A Word to be followed as James makes quite clear to us when he writes. 'Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only!' James 1:22-25.

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

We show our belief in God by obeying His Word!

We show our disbelief by our disobedience to its guidance!

'Hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments' He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.' I John 2:3-5.

All believers are appalled today at the obvious 'falling away' from fellowship in the Gospel and the emergence of a 'cold and formal Churchianity' threatening to entangle the unshackled life which we find in Christ with all kinds of un-Biblical, and even anti-Biblical theories and we see 'the warmth' of the Gospel almost lost in the 'cold' struggle for material blessings.

Obstacles to Christian belief continue to grow daily and as violence and crime are presented as today's answer to injustice and want, and lesser moral and spiritual values are presented to us as, 'acceptable,' our own home and social life is beginning to crumble.

Today the call to satisfy one's own desires is loud and clear!

Some of the churches try to reconcile these differences by a 'compromise', offering ways to worship which appeal to the senses rather than to the spirit. However even though their motives are no doubt worthy none of these ways can succeed because they only draw the seeker to a way of life that is superficial.

Solomon wrote. 'There is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.' Proverbs 14:12.

This is the 'way' many are taking, the 'easy' way. The way of self satisfaction. The 'broad way' of which Matthew has this to say.

'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.' Matthew 7:13.

But! There is a way!

A better way!

A Way which leads to Life Eternal!

And it is to this 'Way' God desires to direct you through His Word.

God is a Real God!

He wants a 'Real People,' separated and surrendered to Himself.

E. R. FINCK.

REAL ONES.

There are three 'kinds' of people mentioned in the Bible.

1. The 'Natural'
2. The 'Lukewarm'
3. The 'Spiritual'

Each 'Kind' lives in a sphere of their own.

Which one are you?

THE NATURAL

'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' I Corinthians 2:14.

They live in the natural world and can no more understand spiritual things than can an unborn child understand the world into which he has yet to be born. They may know many things within the circle in which they live, but outside that circle they are almost complete strangers to the reality of the Christian walk.

Even Nicodemus, a teacher in Israel, once said, 'How can these things be?' John 3:1-21.

Long ago Isaiah wrote, of his people, 'Since the beginning of the world it has not been heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has eye seen, O God except thee, what thou hast prepared for them that wait for thee.' Isaiah 64:4.

But it was left for Paul to write the conclusion for those who love God and he penned these words.

'But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.' I Corinthians 2:10.

They cannot see them because they do not believe in God.

This is most important to recognise as we read in Hebrews.

'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.' Hebrews 11:6.

THE LUKEWARM

'For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.' Romans 8:5-8.

This describes those who profess to be followers of Christ but only serve Him according to their own ideas.

Many may be earnest workers in a Church or Sunday School, or perhaps have devoted themselves to charitable work, or moral issues. All worthy Christian areas, but unless the worker is surrendered to Christ and knows Him as Lord and Master, their efforts generally only lead others to see the 'good works' they do and, unfortunately themselves instead of the Christ they seek to serve, whose command is to, 'Go and preach repentance and remission of sins in My Name.' Luke 24:47.

They know 'of Christ' but do not know Him as Lord and Master.

'And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.' 1 John 2:3-4.

It is so easy to say, 'I believe', and then use our natural reasoning in preference to the Word of God because it seems right, or because circumstances makes it 'appear' right.

Solomon when he exhorted his son to follow the LORD wrote.

'There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death!' Proverbs 14:12.

If we expect to share in Christ's promises we must be prepared to fulfill the conditions.

Sometimes they seek to justify themselves by quoting Scripture but generally, 'out of context.'

Satan did the same when it suited him!

They say they believe!

Well! 'Devils believe also, and tremble.' James 2:19.

They are trying to serve 'Two masters' and the Scripture says, 'Ye cannot.'

There is a phrase which describes their outlook distinctly. 'You can serve two masters, if you are prepared to lie to one of them!'

However John is quite definite. He writes.

'The Truth is not in them!' I John 2:4.

We see more sects today than ever before, each claiming the Bible as their foundation and all building up doctrines absolutely contrary to the Word itself. Romans 10:2-3 describes them, 'They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.'

It is quite possible for a person to be in this position and have a clear conscience for the conscience only convicts when we have a true knowledge of right and wrong. Just consider that for a moment.

Are you Lukewarm?

Does the work you are doing, however 'good' it is, reflect you more than it does Christ?

Consider indeed!

Our Lord said that, 'Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name amongst all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things.' Luke 24:47-48.

Is that the thrust of your service where you now serve?

If you are lukewarm, and prepared to be honest with yourself, it may throw a lot of light on your own position and help you to understand why millions of lukewarm Christians may not feel convicted, although they are unwittingly walking contrary to God's Word.

Of course, the Bible, as a guide to their real purpose in life, is of little value to the lukewarm and they continually need someone to explain it.

This perhaps is another reason why they become involved in 'doing things.'

Being busy makes them 'feel' right!

The sad thing is that they are often content to remain in this state.

Sad because it is here there lies a fatal error.

Some of God's promises that He will reveal the Truth, and Light, and Love to those who want it are.

1. 'Ask, and it shall be given you. Seek, and ye shall find. Knock, and it shall be opened unto you.' Matthew 7:7.
2. Have. 'A hunger and thirst after 'real' righteousness.' Matthew 5:6.
3. Be. 'As the hart which panteth after the water brooks.' Psalm 42:1.
4. Believe! 'Ye shall find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.' Jeremiah 29:13
5. Know. 'He that cometh to God, must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' Hebrews 11:6.
6. 'Search the Scriptures for they testify of me.' John 5:39.

Being busy brings satisfaction of course but self satisfaction is a sure barrier between us and the Living Way. This is very clearly expressed in our Lord's warning to the Churches in Revelation, chapters two and three. They were satisfied to go on being fed with husks. when they should have been feeding others with the Bread of Life.

Luke 11:33 reads, 'No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, (a bowl), but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light.'

Our Christian life should be the same and supply light to others.

It is easy for us to understand that the candle could never give light until it was given that power from another source, surely it is just as easy to understand that the light a Christian gives comes from a supernatural 'living' source.

'It is the Spirit that quickeneth. The flesh profiteth nothing. The words I speak to you', said Jesus, 'they are spirit and they are life.' John 6:63.

However, the lukewarm have it put to them clearly in Hebrews!

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

In plain words, the lukewarm person goes round in circles ever walking the same ground, 'Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.' 2 Timothy 3:7.

This must grieve God for we know from His own record that, 'The carnal mind is at enmity with God,' Romans 8:7. But this is exactly where many of the 'professing' Christians are today, and it is to such it must be said while there is still time.

Heed the last great warning given by our Lord to the professing Church in Revelation!

'These things saith the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.' Revelation 3:14-16.

And as for self satisfaction!

'Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.' Revelation 3:17-19.

This grave warning is given to the Church by the Lord Himself and if this spiritual blindness is not recognized by the ones to whom He addresses that warning a dreadful fate awaits many, because there is no doubt that 'lukewarmness' is the position of many of the Church going, and other professing Christians, of this day.

Until we recognize what Christ has accomplished

Until we know Him as the Son of the living God, and our Saviour.

Until then we can be as zealous as we like for the visible Church, yet never be born into the True Church, (the Body of Christ), which consists of all those who love Him and obey His Word.

If one professes to be a follower of Christ, one must realize that they have become engaged, as it were, to Him and are awaiting the day of marriage. In everyday life this demands love on each side yet, although many say they love God, a few questions reveal they do not even know what loving God means.

It is clear how God expresses His love towards us.

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

And 1 John 4:19 has this.

'We love Him because He first loved us.'

Our part is clear! Listen to John again!

'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' 1 John 4:20.

And, our Lord Himself said, 'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.' John 14,23.

If the gift of love for another so binds us in our affection to one in this world, how much more will it bind us together in this Eternal union.

This is precisely why those who profess Christ and give their affections to worldly things are called 'adulterers!'

'Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?' James 4:4

If this, perchance, is your position before God, there is something you can do to immediately remedy it because Christ is ever waiting to meet us?

Hear His loving invitation!

'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.' Revelation 3:20-21.

My lukewarm friend, if it be so that you know you are lukewarm, this solemn warning from the Lord Himself, which comes a verse or two before His invitation, needs no comment other than this. It is His last warning to the Church!

'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.' Revelation 3:15-16.

Study these two vital chapters in Revelation, chapters two and three, and see which warning fits your case!

THE SPIRITUAL

These, who live in this realm, live a life of 'certainty' never experienced by those who live in the 'Natural' or 'Lukewarm.'

These are they who have known that way at one time, and have been delivered out of the bondage it held over them by the grace of God. They have found a quality of life. A 'quality' that can only be found in the Family of God.

The 'certainty' of belonging to the family.

The knowledge they have an inheritance.

'An inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.' I Peter 1:4.

An inheritance granted because of the 'mercy of God who has begotten us again unto this lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'

An inheritance 'undefiled' with the burden of guilt because 'the wages of sin,' death, has been paid for us by Christ in His death on our behalf on the Cross, and the 'lively hope' assured because of His resurrection.

The awareness that from the very moment they acknowledged what Christ did on their behalf, something of the 'essence', the very Nature of God, was planted within them eager to grow and reach out to others with the message of love and salvation. Romans 8:9.

Romans 5:1 reads. 'Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,' and verses 5 and 6 continue with the thought, and tell us that, 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly.'

This same Holy Ghost assures all that our old life was buried with Christ in our baptism into His death, and we are in like manner risen with Him in His resurrection, a new 'creation', risen to share eternal life with Him. Romans 6:3-11.

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 confirms this.

'Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled himself to us by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation. Now then. We are ambassadors for Christ, and we pray you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God, for He hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.'

The righteousness of Christ is seen as our own!

Although undeserved by us it has been 'imputed' unto us because we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

So many things we can search out together, and shall, as we turn to the Scriptures, because words fail to express the change that takes place in our lives when we are 'born from above' and become a 'new creature.'

It is a real and definite experience and although it will not be as spectacular as Saul's experience on the way to Damascus, it will be just as 'real' and, if you are not sure whether you have entered into this spiritual realm or not, it is a sure thing that you have not.

If you are not sure maybe it is because you are not willing to surrender to God and obey Him?

Perhaps you love the 'things of this world', which you can see, more than the 'things of God' which are spiritually discerned?

Remember Matthew 6:24, 'Ye cannot serve God and Mammon!'

And the words of Jesus recorded in John 12:25-26.

'He that loveth his life, (the 'things' of this life), shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world (that is, he who is willing to forego 'things' for the greater), shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there also shall my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my father honour.'

That saying of our Lord is worth reading again and again, both for the challenge it presents, and the promise it gives!

The attitude of Moses sums it up!

'Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.' Hebrews 11:25-27.

The position of the Natural and the Lukewarm is easily understood.

The natural have no desire to serve God, and they expect no return out of life other than the pleasure living it gives.

They do not want to know Him, much less worship Him!

They are idolaters!

I Corinthians 10:7 has it right!

'The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play!'

It has been the same story throughout the ages and such people stand out in the Word of God as examples of the kind of life to be avoided! Exodus 32:6 confirms it beyond any doubt.

The state of the world today is quite in accordance with New Testament prophecy which declares there were to be those who, 'shall be lovers of their own selves rather than lovers of God. And there would be those who had, 'a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, ever learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.' 2 Timothy 3:2-7.

The lukewarm's lot is a sad one. They have a 'hope' but it is based on man's theories rather than on the Word of God.

However, while we cannot help but feel sorry for them as it is obvious that many have been deceived, none can use this as an excuse because it is truly written that, 'If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.' Matthew 15:14, and Romans leaves us completely without excuse, 'For the invisible things of Him from the beginning of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His Eternal Power and Godhead; So that they are without excuse.' Romans 1:20.

No doubt some will feel that the professing Christian has been harshly dealt with but, as we read the Word of God together, we shall find both the lukewarm and the natural pleaded with and warned time and time again.

They are singularly described in Matthew 15:8-9.

'This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoureth Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me ... in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.'

Paul wrote to Timothy, 'The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth.' 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

1 Timothy 4:1 is specific, 'Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter time some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.'

The keynote in the answer our Lord gave to the three questions the disciples asked of Him in Matthew 24:4-25 is, 'Take heed that no man deceive you!'

Peter is just as outspoken as Paul in his second letter.

'Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandments of us, the apostles of the Lord and Saviour. Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts and saying, where is the promise of His Coming?' 2 Peter 3:2-4.

This is Divine prophecy!

There would be a 'falling away' from the 'faith.'

And we, who are seeing this happening about us, and who are searching God's Word, must face the matter honestly and not be deceived by the opinions of the world.

THE CALL OF GOD

Yes! The Call comes from God Himself, seeking to draw you to Christ so you may find Eternal Life because of what His Son has done for you. A gift of grace that awaits only one thing, your acceptance.

Your acknowledgment that you believe Christ gave His life a ransom for your own, and because of that you are free, saved from the condemnation of sin which came upon all humanity because of Adam's disobedience.

Of course it does require something more than just acceptance from us.

It demands that we look into our life and ways and see how far they have led us from God, and how impossible it is for us to recover ourselves from the position we are in by our own strength.

You may not feel this applies to you!

you have lived a 'good' life, done nothing very wrong, in the light of what you see about you, and you are right, as far as the world is concerned.

But!

Have you recognised God's Presence in the world you walk in, or seen His Hand in Creation, or in your own life?

If you have not then you have both deceived yourself and denied Him for God Himself calls you through it all. 'All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' Romans 3:23.

'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.' Hebrews 11:6.

But while it is obvious some have fallen short because of ignorance, many have done so deliberately. Therefore, to give everyone the opportunity to be saved from this position, 'God has concluded all are under sin' and thus providing a way for all to find forgiveness through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ and escape the condemnation of death.

A condemnation upon all, the result of Adam's rebellion, and now swallowed up in the gift of grace, Eternal Life, which has been given even more freely to all because Christ Jesus, the Son of God, suffered that condemnation of 'death' for everyone, as Paul explains in Romans 5:16-17.

It is given to all who are born into this world but it needs to be accepted when one is capable of doing so, or it fails to be effective.

All sin costs, and as it was impossible for us to pay the ultimate price, 'blood', for 'without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.' Hebrews 9:22.

God's own Son came and paid that price for us.

And because He did so.

All who believe He did this on their behalf, and who are genuinely repentant for their own sins

All who accept the gift He offers through the life He gave.

All these!

All! Are saved from their own sins, and the power of sin, by this gift of grace from God.

In Romans 6:23 we read these words, 'For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Praise God!

There are many of course who look to a Church, a Pastor, a Priest, or a Prophet to find assurance of Eternal Salvation but the Word of God itself tells us, in no uncertain terms, that there is but one place Revelation can be found.

The Scriptures.

There is but one Mediator. Jesus Christ.

And only one true Church. The obedient followers of Christ.

Why then is there so much confusion today?

Why so many Churches?

Why so many sects?

Why are so many in doubt today?

Partly because we all tend to rely on others when we are not sure of our way, and while there is nothing wrong in this, it is wrong when we rely on others without making the effort ourselves to find an answer to our own doubts or our own fears.

There is, in every walk of life, a lack of real hunger for the Truth.

That kind of Truth which is truth whether the answer we get is palatable to us or not.

The World can, and does, give us the smooth answer we want and we generally accept it without question because it is what our 'itching ears' want to hear!

But!

The Scriptures say.

'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' Matthew 5:6.

We all have the tendency to 'resent' or 'get upset' by reproof, rather than learn from it and yet the Word of God clearly reveals it is profitable for us to be corrected.

'A wise man will hear, and will increase learning.' Proverbs 1:5.

Paul when he was encouraging Timothy wrote.

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

Many believe this of course but fail to 'stand fast.'

Paul exhorts Timothy to, 'study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.' 2 Timothy 2:15). The word, 'parestemi', translated as 'shew,' having also the meaning of 'standing with.'

In general, we follow our own inclinations, or 'way,' rather than allowing God to direct our path.

And finally, we fail to be obedient to the Word of God even when we see it directs us to a 'better way.' Hebrews 5:8-9.

'Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.'

Somehow, even though our Saviour gave us such an inspiring example, we will not be obedient to our God and His Word.

In the area of 'correction' of course the Christian is often accused of 'judging,' therefore in correction one must be careful not to be 'judgemental' when any correction is seen which might be helpful to someone struggling with the problems of life.

It is not permitted for a Christian to 'judge' in the sense of 'condemning!' Nor is it correct to carelessly criticise another!

Matthew 7:1 puts it clearly, 'Judge not, that ye be not judged!'

But, it is a responsibility, indeed a 'charge,' to bring the truth of the Word of God to those who are astray, as we have just read in 2 Timothy 3:16. God has caused this to be written many times. The Preacher, Solomon, wrote:

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.' Proverbs 17.

'He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction.' Proverbs 10:17.

'He that refuseth instruction despiseth his own soul.' Proverbs 15:32.

'There are many devices in a man's heart: nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand.' Proverbs 19:21.

The Psalmist David, encourages us to walk in the Way.

'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.

The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart.

The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever.

The judgements of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

'More to be desired are they than gold, yea, more than fine gold. Sweeter also than honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned, and in keeping of them is great reward.' Psalm 19:7-11.

For those who lack confidence, and direction, the same Psalm has this.

'Who can understand his errors?

Cleanse thou me from secret faults.

Keep back thy servant from presumptuous sins.

Let them not have dominion over me.

'Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.' Psalm 19:12-14.

There is a love that draws us and it holds a promise.

'I love them that love me, and those that seek me early shall find me.' Proverbs 8:17.

There are blessings that follow obedience.

'For whoso findeth Me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.' Proverbs 8:35.

The end of those who refuse instruction is also clear.

'He that sinneth against Me, wrongeth his own soul, all they that hate Me, love death!' Proverbs 8:36.

We can see that God would have us to think less of our own way and more of His, and to be prepared to receive instruction, even correction, if we desire true life.

And further, throughout His Word, He gives us to understand that whilst men will introduce theories and use many devices to prove they are right, it is His counsel and His commandments only that will stand.

Let us clearly understand these truths as we search out His Word.

CHRISTIANITY

Many today profess to be living the Christian life.

Most have been brought up in Christian homes, or in homes with a Christian atmosphere, and continue to live in the way they have been taught, and believe is right. They have their own ideas about spiritual matters, and indeed, often insist their Pastor must teach them what they believe or he will be dismissed!

They are satisfied!

Seemingly unaware that the only way to Eternal Life is by obedience to those things made known to us in the Scriptures and revealed to us by Christ.

'Why call ye me, Lord, and do not the things which I say?' said our Lord in Luke 6:46.

'This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.' 1 John 5:3.

We are, for the most part, a deluded people and it is often our own fault because we do not have a real hunger for the truth.

'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.' Matthew 5:6.

And, although none of us dare use it as an excuse for our own spiritual shortcomings, there is another reason for the apathy we see.

Those to whom we have looked for spiritual guidance have failed to fulfill the commission clearly given by Christ our Lord!

He said!

'Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.' Matthew 28:19-20.

It is not what we think but what the Lord desires us to do.

Not 'some' things, but 'ALL' things!

Not what man says, but what God demands.

Paul, with this in mind, wrote these words to those in Galatia.

'Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel than that we have preached unto you, let him be accursed!' Galatians 1:8-9.

He considered this to be of such importance that he repeated it to Timothy as Timothy was about to enter into the ministry of the Gospel.

'Preach the Word,' he wrote. 'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine!' 2 Timothy 4:2-3.

And, as we look back through the centuries and survey the times that crowd about us now, we can see how often the clarity of the Word has been clouded by the opinions of our would be spiritual leaders who have failed to teach 'all things' as commanded by our Lord.

The most important, the need for the regeneration of our wayward hearts, is often neglected and, while the teaching of good moral values is a part of the Christian way of life, the emphasis should be on our need for salvation, the awfulness of sin, the remedy God has given for sinners, and the marvellous inheritance God has provided for us because of what Christ has done.

Teaching about a 'good life' has led many Christians into a 'lukewarm state' of self righteousness, and they live out their own idea of salvation in the narrow confines of what the Christian life means to them, and are more than content in their 'cosy and warm' atmosphere.

It is an awful snare!

A snare of Satan himself and, by this he has led the professing Church into a place where not only are many quite ignorant of the vital teachings of our Lord Jesus, but also dreadfully unaware of them!

It is because we have been unwatchful, and unless we become more alert and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all things, we shall miss the 'narrow' Way of Life our Lord told us to enter.

'Enter ye in at the strait gate: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it' Matthew 7:13-14.

How can we find this 'Way' of life?

Let us allow the Word of God to answer.

It is a spiritual way, not discerned by even the keenest eye.

'There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen.' Job 28:7.

There is a way to find it.

'Stand ye in the ways and see. Ask for the old paths where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.' Jeremiah 6:16.

It is a living way!

'Jesus saith, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me!' John 14:6.

It is not just a 'changed' life.

It is a 'New' life.

'Old things are passed away; behold all things are become new.' 2 Corinthians 5:17.

It may even be difficult but we do not walk it alone.

Job knew this with every fibre of his being, even in the depths of his trials, and wrote these inspiring words to encourage us today.

'He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.' Job 23:10.

And Timothy encourages us to remember a most important thing!

'The LORD knoweth them that are his.' 2 Timothy 2:19.

We are His!

THE CHRISTIAN

Who then are these Christians?

There is a universal lack of understanding as to what 'makes up' a Christian.

The general idea has emerged that a Christian is a person who first of all believes in God and lives a reasonably good life.

Someone who is honest and always ready to do someone a 'good turn.'

However, the truth is, that a person may be all this and more and still be under the condemnation of death. And, what I think or you may think, does not alter the fact at all.

God's Word, our only authority, reveals we have all 'fallen short' of what God requires. We are all born, as it were, under the sentence of death because of the disobedience of our first parents and God has, as we read before, 'concluded all under sin,' so that the remedy He has provided in Christ may be grasped by all.

The plain teaching of Scripture is that a Christian is an obedient follower of Christ, one who has been saved by what Christ has done, and not through any works of their own.

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

Nothing that anyone is able to do, can merit or purchase for them a place in the Kingdom of Heaven.

The Scriptures we shall read together will make this so plain that no one will be able to dismiss the problem by saying, 'It is a matter of interpretation.'

There is no excuse for those with eyes to see or ears to hear.

His workmanship is about us every where in His Creation.

His Word is printed in every language available.

His faithful followers have presented the Gospel throughout the centuries, and they continue to do the same today.

The disciples were told to 'tarry' until they were given power from on high and then they were to go out and preach the Gospel.

'Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.' Luke 24:46-49.

This is our task!

We have not been chosen to lead others into some kind of an organization which will solve all their worldly problems.

We have been chosen to declare the Kingdom of God is at hand and if we concentrate on doing what God has given us to do, that is, preaching the Gospel, God will raise up those who are capable of doing these 'other' things so we can work in harmony together because, it is obvious, some kind of communion with one another in Christ is essential so that we work in unison in this heavenly fellowship.

Unfortunately so many of us are so sure our own way is right that we sometimes fail to hear God's voice as He calls us to the task He has for us!

Indeed some are so sure they alone have the 'right' assessment of a given situation that they fail to hear any alternatives.

We are to preach the Gospel and if we do not it is because we are disobedient.

Yes! Disobedient!

And disobedience is the primary cause of the state in which we find the world and Christendom today. It has been the downfall of humanity from the beginning until the present day, and it will be the reason why millions will be rejected when Christ comes for His own.

'Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.' Matthew 7:21-23.

Remember, this is addressed, not to the godless, but to those who quite expected a place in His kingdom. These are they who profess to follow God's Plan, but who have not experienced real salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He went on to say. 'Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man.' Matthew 7:24 and 26.

Christ himself gave a warning picture of that day in the parable of the ten virgins.

The ten all expected to be with the bridegroom but only five were ready when the bridegroom came.

The five who were left behind had not done all that was necessary in preparation for their marriage and it is easy to see what our Lord meant.

If the professing Christian has this same outlook it means they stand in danger of rejection for they have not done that which is required of them, or they have done it carelessly, or in their own way.

Many today are so busy in Christian 'things' they have no time to listen to the Master's voice and do the 'things that are really needful.'

Unlike Mary who chose to sit at Jesus' feet and hear His words. Luke 10:38-42.

A careful and prayerful study of this portion of Scripture holds much blessing, for truly if we are 'cumbered' about with just 'things' we miss the 'good part'.

JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Many earnest and sincere people are misled in thinking they can gain salvation by 'good-works,' but nowhere does the Scripture teach we can be justified by any thing we do.

On the contrary. It is only by what has been done for us that we can find justification.

'While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.' Romans 5:8-9.

When God called to Adam and Eve they tried to hide themselves and failed, and so do we fail when we try to hide our shortcomings by self righteous acts.

Acts which are good, look good, and even make us feel good.

Adam and Eve were not able to face God until He had clothed them, nor are we ready 'to go boldly to His throne,' Hebrews 10:19-20, until we are clothed with the righteousness of God, a gift given to us by grace, and made available to us because of the sacrifice Christ Himself made on our behalf and, because of that, the same righteousness which is Christ's is now given to us, 'imputed unto us,' the moment we repent of our sins, believe with our hearts, and confess with our lips, that Christ is the Son of the Living God and our Saviour.

We know Abraham believed that whatever God promised he would do He would do and because of that belief, 'It was imputed unto him for righteousness,' and God has promised that, if we believe as Abraham believed, we too shall receive the end of our faith and the righteousness of Christ will be 'imputed' unto us.

Not for anything any of us have done, but because of belief! Romans 4:22.

We can see understand this righteousness was not just promised 'only' to Abraham because he believed but is promised to all who believe, as Abraham believed, in the promises made in Scripture.

'But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead; who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand.' Romans 4:24 to Romans 5:2.

Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians declared.

'For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that, not of your selves. It is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.' Ephesians 2:8-9.

It is not through any good work, or service, or even by obedience to any 'good' laws that we are saved, because our disobedience lies deeper than that.

Mere obedience to a Law that suits us and suggests to our conscience that we are righteous if we obey them, even though our own heart tells us it is 'make belief,' is but clothing ourselves inadequately as did Adam and Eve.

No!

It is not in any way like that we are saved!

We are saved by the grace of God and it happens the moment we believe in what Christ, His Son, has done on our behalf.

Anything else is mere 'window dressing' for an unbelieving world to see, and if any praise that comes is directed towards us instead of to God. We are probably a little 'self righteous.'

Into this now comes something which at first seems to contradict all that has been said!

Yet, after thought, it is obvious the end of our new found faith results in 'good fruit', or works!

The thing to see is the difference between the two!

Works cannot save but, knowledge that we are saved by what Christ has done for us, brings forth a 'fruit' of its own. Not a fruit that reflects our 'goodness' in doing some 'work', but a 'goodness' which points to the One to whom all praise should be given.

God Himself!

Faith which doesn't bring forth this kind of fruit is dead!

James 2:14 has this, 'What does it profit a man if he say he hath faith, and have not works?' And in verse 20 he repeats the thought by writing, 'O vain man, Faith without works is dead!'

Now, if you have been under any misunderstanding about the works referred to here, settle it for yourself, here and now, once and for all time!

James is writing about the works which follow faith not those which precede it, nor even those works which are done according to an ethical or religious law.

He is talking about laws followed because they are obeyed from the heart.

A heart that has God's laws warmly written there in the flesh.

Not cold formal laws written on stone that can be 'got around' or 'evaded' by excuses or by obeying the letter rather than the spirit. James 2:10-16.

It is most important to distinguish thus between the 'works of Faith' and ordinary 'good works' The knowledge that we have been saved by grace when we know in our hearts we did not deserve it should encourage us to share this freedom, this joy, this new life, with others. It is without argument that our new lives, our new 'life style', will show the fruit of the Spirit which has been given us.

Of course people who have known you and your weaknesses will deride you or tell you it won't last but read again what Paul wrote to all.

God has planted the very 'essence' of His Nature into us and has given unto us His Spirit so this 'essence' will be nurtured and grow. Romans 8:1-11.

Peter in his second letter refers to this in particular.

'Grace and peace,' he writes, 'be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, who has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness. Whereby we are given great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature.' 2 Peter 1:2-10.

Peter continues, asking us to bring forth fruit which shows that fruit is the work of the spirit in a life surrendered to Christ.

He pens, 'If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Give diligence to make your calling and your election sure. If ye do these things ye shall never fall.'

Paul urges us to the same High calling when he wrote to the Philippians in this manner.

'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.' Philippians 2:12.

Of course those words, out of context, are used by some sects to urge their members to 'good works' to obtain salvation but Paul is writing to these already saved, as is obvious by the way he addresses the letter itself, 'To all the saints in Christ.' Philippians 1:1.

They were men and women already rejoicing in the salvation they had found in Christ still living in a difficult and unbelieving world and Paul knowing this is asking them, and through them us, to continue in the faith, to bear 'the Cross', to share the afflictions of the Gospel, and to be confident that what God has begun in us He will fulfill!

We are not to be afraid of the enemies who came against us but rather be mindful of what Christ has done for us and ready to share that knowledge with others who need Him now. Paul was not at all worried that they might fail for he knows how they have acted in the past. 'For,' he continues, 'It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the Word of Life.' Philippians 2:12-16.

It is obvious to all, except those who do not wish to see that, 'working out our own salvation', means to show forth 'the works which follow faith.'

We show the depth of our 'faith by obeying His Word!

Let us briefly retrace our steps for a moment.

We have seen the 'foolishness' of an empty profession even though it may be supported by many 'good works!'

We have seen it is impossible to say we love God if we will not obey His Word.

We have seen it is only by faith we are justified.

We have seen that faith, without works, is dead.

These are the facts, and God has clearly revealed them to us.

Therefore, there is only one course for you to follow if you are in earnest about knowing God.

You need to say, from your heart!

'Lord! What will you have me to do?'

Just as Paul did on the way to Damascus, Acts 9:6, and at that very moment God will answer you.

Peter, when asked. 'What shall we do to be saved?'

Answered with the words.

'Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' Acts 2:38.

If this is the cry of your heart you will be 'born from above.'

The Word of God will have new meaning for you!

Life will have new doors for you to open.

You will know what it means to be a 'partaker of the Divine Nature' 2 Peter 1:4.

BELIEVERS BAPTISM

Many of those who should be leading us spiritually are failing here. They are neither teaching the importance of Baptism, nor observing it themselves!

Some say it is not necessary and neglect it.

Others dispute the method of administering it and offer alternatives.

However, any of these measures clearly show they either have no real desire to obey Christ, or they are ignorant of what Scripture has to say about baptism and what it signifies.

The last words of our Lord in Matthew are these.

'Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you.' Matthew 28:19-20.

The first words of Peter to those who were stirred by his message at Pentecost were. 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' Acts 2:38.

Our Lord was baptized to 'fulfill all righteousness', and He sent His disciples out to 'teach, baptize, and observe all things' He had commanded.

John pens we witness to our love by 'keeping His commandments.'

Matthew records the baptism of Jesus Himself in this way.

'Then came Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. And Jesus said. 'Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.' Matthew 3:13-15. And John in his first letter writes 'This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous.' I John 5:3.

Just consider all this carefully!

You need not doubt any longer!

Christ Himself was baptized and He wants you to follow Him in the same way.

It is a sign to the world you know, and the world which knew you, that you are a 'new' person, that you have finished with the old life and have 'buried it' in baptism in preparation to walk a 'new life' with Christ.

Of course it is difficult to declare to those who have known you for so many years that you were wrong about the way you have lived for so long, particularly when those to whom you witness are close friends, or members of your family, who have been 'brought up' with the same outlook as you have had.

But!

The moment you do!

You experience your first victory in Christ!

This outward sign of your inner conviction is your first witness that the Way of Christ is now your Way!

They will see you are indeed a 'New Creature' in this initial sign to the world that you have finished with the old life, which you have now buried, and you are prepared to walk, by the grace of God, in newness of life.

Romans 6:4-5 has this tremendous thing to say.

'Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.'

If you are in earnest with Him you will know the new life and all your friends will see it in you also!

Therefore if a man hath put on Christ he is a new creature. Old things are passed away. Behold all things are become new.' 2 Corinthians 5:17.

'As many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ.' Galatians 3:27.

Baptism is an act of obedience which follows on from belief, and, although it will be disputed by many, we are not saved by the act of baptism, we are saved by what Christ has done on our behalf.

Salvation does not come through works it is a 'gift of God, lest any man should boast.' Ephesians 2:8-9.

To follow Christ in baptism shows the depth of our belief in the truth of what He has done for us.

The quality of that love we have declared for Him!

The strength of our purpose in that we are prepared to face the possible 'ridicule' of our friends and the sometimes 'sarcasm' of those loved ones who have been 'brought up' with a different outlook on the matter.

Baptism is a command, but it is a command obeyed from love, not because of a law.

It is the will of God that we be baptized and it signifies our complete willingness to enter into all things which Christ taught, so we shall be truly known as His disciples.

It declares to the world we once knew that we have surrendered completely to Him as our Lord and Master.

Therefore, if anyone goes their 'own way' after being baptized, it simply means they went into the water a 'dry sinner' and came out of it a 'wet one!'

There was no change!

We can be misled of course by others even though they are sincere, but God is not the 'author of confusion' and His Word leaves no doubt either as to the moment for baptism, or the way it is to be entered into.

That moment comes when we believe with all our heart.

1. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God and our Saviour.
2. He died for our sin and in our place.
3. His shed blood brought us reconciliation with God.
4. His resurrection brought us the promise of eternal life.
5. His baptism by John was to 'fulfill all righteousness.'

Surely the example of our Master is enough incentive for us to do the same ourselves?

Peter thought so and exhorted all who believed to be baptized.

'Believe, repent and be baptized,' he declared and that day many thousands believed his word and followed our Lord in baptism! Acts 2:38-47.

So, having come to that place of belief and repentance we need to consider the mode of baptism!

Many think it to be by 'sprinkling', administered soon after birth, and confirmed at an age when the recipients are of sufficient spiritual awareness to understand what has been done for them, but the Scriptures clearly declare that baptism is for those who are already believers.

Martin Luther taught that the sacraments of Baptism and the Last Supper could only be taken by those who believed and none 'could accept, or apply for another, for the promise of God, which required the faith of the individual.' His opinion was that these two Sacraments were the most important, 'because they had been directly instituted by Christ, and both were the right of the believer, and as such depended for their efficiency upon the faith of the believer.'

They were the right of the believer only.

Despite this, the practice of christening infants became established because of both 'custom' and the ingrained fear that had been instilled in parents that their children would be eternally lost unless they were baptized at birth.

Surely to us now, who have complete and free access to the Scriptures, Romans has the answer to that!

Here Paul tells us that while it is certain that sin, and consequently the punishment for sin, 'death', entered the world and was upon all until Christ came, it also declares that when He came, a much more glorious gift came upon the same 'all.'

'Therefore as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification.' Romans 5:12,15:19.

Children are now free of this 'condemnation' until of the age to decide whether to be obedient or disobedient to God for themselves.

We have seen parents tortured by guilt all their lives because they had not been able to have their child christened before it died.

We have seen expectant parents troubled by the thought their child might die before they could be christened, and we have heard of compassionate priests awake all night so that they might be on hand to baptize a sickly child before death.

What a twisting of the Scriptures!

God is unwilling that any should perish and His provision in sending His Son as Saviour provided for all those unable to account for themselves until they were of an age, or mind, to so do.

The Bible is clear on this in all the Scriptures.

Romans 5 explains it in the New, and Ezekiel 18 in the Old.

However whilst that fact is a matter for further study and at another time, the Word is clear about the duty of the believer now.

Baptism is the next step and the way of it is by immersion!

We have the record of Christ Himself being baptized by John in Matthew 3:13-16, and we are distinctly told that He came 'up out of the water' after His baptism, and that God expressed His pleasure and sealed His beloved Son with the Holy Spirit.

It is obvious that if our Lord came up out of the water he must first have gone down into it. Mark 1:10, and John the Baptist baptized at Aenon because, 'there was much water there.' John 3:23.

And when Philip baptized the eunuch the account is just as clear. Acts 8:34-40.

They both 'went down into the water' and, after Philip had baptized him, they both 'came up out of the water.'

The most telling account of the reason for immersion in the case of baptism is Romans 6:3-5.

We are 'buried with Him by baptism into death' and as we come up out of the water it signifies we are 'risen with Him by the glory of the Father' to newness of life!

Colossians 2:12 repeat this with all its promise.

'Buried with him in baptism, wherein ye are also risen with him through the faith of the operation of God who hath raised him from the dead.'

There is one act, and one act alone, which can correspond with these records and that is total immersion in water.

Baptism is a distinct command! Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:16, Acts 2:38.

There are many of course who have not seen this and following custom have been christened as infants and later 'confirmed.'

If at that confirmation, they in all sincerity, repeat the vows that have once been made for them, and commit their way to God, no one on this earth has the right to pass judgment on them.

However. If they come to recognize that baptism after belief is required their course is just as clear and they should be baptized by immersion to become 'baptized believers.'

Baptism itself does not save.

It follows on from salvation.

Any 'command' is contained in the saying, 'If ye love Me keep My commandments,' and hangs upon that phrase 'obeyed because of love!'

Remember! We are saved by what Christ has done.

Justified by faith!

Jesus was baptized to 'fulfill all righteousness.'

He has asked us to follow Him.

How do you stand in this first act of obedience?

James 1:22 has this!

'Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only.'

THE NEW BIRTH

If you have decided to follow Jesus the Christ as Lord, and have obeyed Him in the act of baptism, you have entered into the life of Christ. Acts 2:38.

You have received the gift of the Holy Spirit and the very Nature of God has been planted within you waiting to grow. Romans 8:9-11.

It is surely a time to join with Paul in, 'giving thanks to the Father who hath made us fit to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son, in whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.' Colossians 1:12-14.

To be 'born from above' brings that essential change all those who believe need in their lives.

Now, instead of being natural men' who serve the world, they are 'spiritual men' who, though they still live in the same world, have the power to bring the 'things' of the world into subjection.

No longer do those 'things' rule them!

However, unless this change has occurred, the way into the kingdom is still barred because it is certain 'flesh and blood' cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.

It is just as clear!

That.

Until this change has taken place the spiritual 'things' of God cannot be understood for they are at enmity with the natural.

I Corinthians 2:9-14 has this to say. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit, for the spirit searcheth all things.'

Paul goes on to say that even though we had been able to understand, by our own reasoning, much of Creation, all that has changed tremendously now that God has given us of His Spirit.

Now we can not only discern the things God has provided for us but also how and why they were provided.

He writes. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.'

To be spiritual does not mean that the natural things of the world no longer exist, or are no longer important. It simply means that we now have the ability to discern their proper place in the world and in our lives.

It means that no longer do these natural things dominate and direct our lives, our emotions, our ambitions and our pleasures.

It means that having become the children of God we are able, because His nature now dwells in us, to have control and discipline over worldly 'wants' and, not only still enjoy the beauty the world presents, but perhaps even more and in a deeper sense, because it is now enjoyed in companionship with our Creator.

It has always been His desire to share His Creation' and the fruit of it with us but, unfortunately, without His Holy Spirit to guide us, our minds, instincts, and bodies respond only to the pleasure Creation gives, and the Giver is forgotten!

But although He made 'all things for Himself, Revelation 4:11, and they are created 'for His Glory', He also 'giveth life and breath to all things,' Acts 17:21-29, and early in the Christian faith that happy thought was expressed in an old hymn. It includes this lovely line, 'Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts cannot rest, until they rest in thee,' and if you have not experienced this new awareness then it is time to re-examine the depth of that belief you expressed, for to fail here is to fail everywhere.

Our Lord Himself said. 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit' and right here lies a dilemma that entangles many because the flesh is always at war with the spirit. John 3:6.

It is so easy to say, 'I believe', so easy to be baptized because of conviction, and so easy to enter a fellowship that accepts in love someone seen as a converted sinner, that the temptation to see this as 'enough' is overwhelming and one can begin to feel that this is 'all' there is to salvation.

And it is true!

If we believe with all our heart that Jesus is the Christ, and He died for us, and we have followed Him in baptism, we are saved!

BUT!

Unless the very depth of that belief of itself brings forth fruit, something is lacking.

It is self evident!

The Christian walk doesn't mean just 'being good!'

There are many good people in the world and that is just what our Lord was telling Nicodemus when He said, 'that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit' because the fruit of both are obvious.

Much fruit of the flesh is good of course although it witnesses to nothing else than of the one who does good.

The difference in the fruit of the Spirit is found in the fact it witnesses to the power of God and is specific as to its nature.

A comparison of the two natures in Ephesians 5 shows the dramatic difference between them and demonstrates that those acts done in the flesh fall far short of the 'glory of God.'

So, unless the old nature is brought under control and is dead, new life cannot spring forth.

Our Lord illustrated this when He said.

'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.' John 12:24 .

But we have no power to overcome until, and unless, we are 'born from above', and we cannot live the 'spiritual life' until we are willing to sacrifice the life we are now living.

'I am crucified with Christ,' wrote Paul, 'Nevertheless I live; Yet! Not!! But Christ liveth in me! And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me!' Galatians 2:20.

One cannot serve God and the world.

One or the other must prevail.

The story of the five wise and the five foolish virgins we briefly looked at before makes this very clear to us. Matthew 25:1-12.

The five foolish virgins had certainly accepted their bridegrooms but had neglected to be ready for him when he came, and in fact were still busily engaged in their own affairs when he did call. They had believed the things of the moment to be of more value than the preparations for their marriage, so that when he came they were not ready.

If we can spiritualize this by saying they were engaged in the material things of life rather than in the spiritual, we can see the point of the story.

Our Lord is saying we should not be engaged in the things of the world at the expense of ignoring the things concerning Him, or we may be left behind when He calls for us.

He knows us and he knows our weaknesses!

Revelation 3:1 has this warning in it!

'I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead! Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die, for I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember! Hold fast! Repent! If thou shalt not watch I shall come as a thief and thou shalt not know!'

Professing Christians have, at some time or another, made a decision for Christ. Perhaps joined a church, certainly experienced a change in their lives, but they are still trying to serve God, 'in the flesh.'

Paul writes. 'They have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge, For they, being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.' Romans 10:2-3.

They have not yet made a 'full surrender' to God and because of this have not yet been 'born from above.'

Hence they have no power.

Now, if any are still in doubt as to where they stand, the next few Scriptures must reveal whether they are in the way of life or the paths of death.

'Therefore if any man be in christ' he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.' 2 Corinthians 5:17 .

'Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now! If a man hath not the Spirit of Christ, (the new Nature), he is none of His. And! If Christ be in you, the body, (the old nature), is dead.' Romans 8:9-10.

The new nature has taken over from the old for, as we read in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, God has planted His own Nature within us and it rests there waiting to grow as we water it with the Word.

Peter, in his second letter, writes. We have been given, 'Exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the Divine Nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world.' 2 Peter 1:4.

Of course these are only a few of the Scriptures which show the absolute necessity of the death of the 'old life' and the birth of 'the new' but, they are more than enough to prove to anyone, beyond all doubt and contradiction, that God has definitely provided only one way to enter His Family and to continue to walk in that way we have need to bring 'the flesh' into subjection by the power of the Holy Spirit which now dwells within us.

That is to say, our lives with their desires and affections, the pleasures of the world, even our conversation and our thoughts, must be disciplined, not 'done away' with by some magical means, but brought into subjection by the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:24 has this.

'They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.'

Paul writes in Colossians 3:1 -3.

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections above, not on the things of the earth! For ye are dead and your life is hid with Christ in God.'

Of course it is the Holy Spirit alone that can bring about this change.

In our own strength it is impossible.

Our part is to believe and surrender to God!

The word 'believe' is often taken quite lightly but the Greek word for 'believe' implies much more than a simple assent to a fact and we will better understand the Scriptures, and their importance to our growth and salvation when we understand the real meaning of 'belief.'

The Greek word 'pisteuo' speaks of being steadfast, implying the need, to 'work hard' and, even if much effort or hardship or travail is encountered, to keep on 'working.' So, if we 'believe' on Christ in the sense the Greek word demands we are to cling firmly to Him and, despite any and all opposing forces that may come against us continue, as Paul told the Corinthians, to 'stand fast.' 1 Corinthians 16:13.

in no way can the word 'believe' refer merely to an historical belief in the existence of Christ, or a mere 'head' belief in His power in the world and in our personal life!

Perhaps you have doubts about what God means by 'serving the flesh?'

There is no need to remain in any doubt about this, or whether you are 'born from above', and if you find the substance of our next chapter makes you uneasy, or perhaps even makes you a little angry, then you may be sure the 'natural' man has not yet been brought under subjection and that the Holy Spirit has not yet been able to work in your life as much as He wants to!

Well meaning good and godly men may tell you that their way is better, or that you, 'Don't have to go that far!' but friend, the Word of God warns you! Take your eyes off man, drop their worthless

opinions, and your own, and see that your hope, your only hope of Eternal Life, is based upon what Christ has already accomplished in His sufferings, His death on the Cross, and His Resurrection.

Walk in obedience to His commands as they are clearly presented in the Word of God, and you will know His Presence with you in all that you do!

8|THE SEPARATED LIFE|FORE=15|BACK=1|MARG=5|SCFX=

THE SEPARATED LIFE

'Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the LORD, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you. And I will be to you a Father, and ye shall be my sons and daughters.' 2 Corinthians 6:17-18.

The vision of the 'separated life' is at first perhaps one of the most difficult to define, and indeed, the most difficult to follow unless we are guided therein by the Holy Spirit, so before we begin to decide what is meant by the 'separated life' it might be as well for us to see what it is not.

It is not for instance a 'call' to believers to join a denomination or a sect and follow the path they proclaim which, although not obviously so, may be ungodly!

And it is not a reasonable excuse for men and women to leave the world with all its temptations and go to live in isolation or in a monastery or a convent where they are separated from the world that seeks to draw them away from God, so that they can be secure there from temptation!

None of these reasons are valid!

The call is first to separate oneself from the unworthy or ungodly things which would draw us away from God, and these are self evident, as Paul points out in Romans 12:2. Such as blind adherence to custom, or fashion. The latest 'trend' in the arts, wherever it might lead us, or a 'blind' following of a sport or a pastime we love whether it be on the Lord's Day or not.

Not that we have to 'give them up', or be 'judgemental' about them, but that we deal with them circumspectly as God's children.

The second call is to separate ourselves from the company of those who are, as our Lord expressed it, 'of the world.'

Not to ignore them or fail to try and reach them with the Gospel.

Not that we have no business dealings with them, or avoid them in our daily walk but, that we are to have no 'close' relationship with those who are avowedly 'of the world,' who want 'no part' of God at all.

James wrote. 'Know ye not that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore desireth to be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.' James 4:4.

James is not referring to 'things' here but to the, 'world of the ungodly,' a distinction made by our Lord Himself when He said, 'If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own. But because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. the world hateth you.' John 15:18.

This is emphasised by John in his first letter when he wrote.

'Marvel not if the world hate you. We know we have passed from death to life.'

He is making a distinction between those who have passed from 'death to life' and those who are 'of the world.' 1 John 3:13-14.

He makes this even clearer in the fifth chapter when in verses 18-19 he writes. 'We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.'

The 'world' plainly means those who are 'not of God' and, just as plainly, those who are 'of God', are not of the world, therefore intimate friendship between us is undesirable.

However! We are to love them as ourselves for they are the very 'neighbors' to whom God sends us.

Separation is not ignoring the 'world' and the 'things of the world', it is discerning our place in that 'world', and dealing sensibly and honestly with all our associations with others without any other judgment, than observing their need for Christ in their unwitting 'enmity' with God.

Here John is most specific about those who do not believe that Jesus is the Christ. He writes that if any one comes to us who does not believe in the things Christ taught we are neither to welcome them as friends or even bid them 'God speed.' 2 John 9-11.

Again this does not mean we avoid them at the cost of losing a chance to point them to Christ.

It does not mean we cannot do business with them.

It does not mean we are not to do them any kindness when they are in need and it is in our power to do help them.

But we must be careful not to let our association, whatever it may be with them, draw us away into 'their' world.

Our Lord leaves us a final word of encouragement because, as He lifted His voice to His Father, He said. 'I have given them thy word, and the world hateth them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that you should take them out of the world, but that thou should keep them from the evil.' John 17:14-16.

No doubt many will say at this point, 'I see no harm in the 'things' of the world', and they have every right to say so, for it is true, there are many 'things' of the world which are not harmful in themselves, they only become harmful, and are even dangerous, when they intrude upon our lives and draw us away from the better things of life so that, in the end, we could lose contact with God.

One of the most direct verses in the Scriptures is the one which says, 'Ye cannot serve God and mammon!', and while many again would insist this can be done, God Himself says it cannot!

You will serve one or the other. Matthew 6:24.

Do I hear some poor soul, not yet fully aware of their glorious inheritance in Christ, saying now, 'Do I have to give up this or that?'

No! You do not have to 'give up' anything!

When the love of God really opens your heart to Him and you see what He has prepared for you, all the things that now seem so precious to you will be as dust!

'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But! God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit!' 1 Corinthians 2:9-10.

No longer will come the question to your lips, 'Does it matter if I do this or that?' or, 'Should I be going to this 'place' or not?' or, 'Are they the people with whom I should be gathering as friends?' because you will only want to know Him, and His children.

You will only want to enjoy the pleasures He has provided, and you will only want to enjoy them in His company!

You will only want to walk with Him and with His people!

It will require just one thing.

You will need to be wholehearted.

Not doubtful!

Not double minded!

Not lukewarm!

But wholehearted!

Listen first to His word of warning again.

'I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot! So then! Because thou art lukewarm, I will spue thee out of my mouth!'

Then hearken to His loving call!

'Behold! I stand at the door, and knock: If anyone hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne. He that hath an ear let them hear!' Revelation 3:20-22.

My lukewarm friend open your heart's door widely to Him, that He may enter in and bless you eternally!

Satan is anxious that we fail and from that moment in the Garden when he turned Eve's attention to the beauty of the tree and its desirable fruit until both she and Adam disobeyed God and ate of it, he has tried to lead everyone astray who sought to come to God.

There was no harm in the fruit, the harm was in the act of disobedience and was made worse perhaps by the fact that in disobeying they had partaken of a blessing intended for the future before either of them were ready for the knowledge the tree had for them.

Satan uses the same tactics today as he used in the Garden then, as he did later in the wilderness when he tried the children of Israel at Sinai, and when he tempted our Lord in the desert!

His attempts are pictured throughout both the Old and the New Testament as a warning for us, and we can see that separation from God and death are the reward of following him.

'Now! All these things happened unto them for ensamples, and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world have come. Wherefore! Let him who thinketh that he standeth take heed lest he fall. There is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful! He will not allow you to be tempted above that you are able, but will, with the temptation, also make a way of escape that ye may be able to bear it!' I Corinthians 10:11-13.

For the present God demands no more of you than that you make the choice as to whether you will follow Him willingly or not.

He does not make anyone do any thing.

He will not 'pressure' you.

He has provided a world for us, and a way of life and, even though we have strayed from His path, He has provided a way back to Him if we wish to take it.

He wants us, desperately!

But it is our choice!

Will you make it now!

Don't be double minded!

Don't be doubtful!

Don't be lukewarm!

Separate yourself to Him now!

'Let them who are unjust be unjust still, and they that are filthy, let them be filthy still, but blessed are they that do His commandments, that they might have the right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.' Revelation 22:11,14.

It is inevitable of course that this separation will bring us into conflict with the world we have left, and for some this will at first be an experience that will be not only difficult but well nigh impossible.

They will truly need those comforting words of Peter to be able to bear it.

'Beloved,' he writes. 'Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy.' I Peter 4:12-13.

All who decide to follow Christ will suffer some kind of reaction from the world, although, for those who live in a land where freedom of expression is allowed, this may be no more than being avoided by one's former friends, or ridiculed by one's family.

One may also feel 'deserted.'

However. The new life in Christ will soon be filled with others of like mind to yourself and the joy of your new found faith will blossom into a fellowship the like of which you had never before imagined could exist.

For those who suffer, and some even today have been called to suffer unto death, the reality that you are 'partakers with Christ Jesus' in these sufferings will be your strength.

The hearts of those who do not have to suffer as you do, yet love Him just as much, ache to support you and yearn for your deliverance, and while their prayers to God for you shall never cease, their thanks to God for your faithfulness shall resound forever.

For those of us who are not called to suffer 'resisting unto blood,' Hebrews 12:3-4, let us indeed support with our prayers and means, all those who do suffer persecution and loss for His sake, that glory will come to His Name through them.

ASSURANCE OF ETERNAL LIFE

There is absolutely no doubt that many of those who go to Church, have never been 'born again.'

Indeed many of those who should be our spiritual leaders, can have this accusation levelled at them also!

It is certainly a fact that when our Lord was on earth this was the case and they were mainly the ones who would not believe and obey His Word. Our Lord Himself said, 'This people honoureth me with their lips but their heart is far from me.' Mark 7:6.

Of course, in these last few years the term 'born again' has lost the meaning it once had and has been 'picked-up' by politicians, sportsmen and sportswomen, and those in business, because it implies a new approach, a clean approach, or a trustworthy principle in their activities with a view to attracting support to their cause, or to their product. Only recently a prominent firm specialising in wardrobes showed a disgracefully untidy clothing wardrobe and urged buyers to invest in their positively arranged system and enjoy the delights of a 'born-again' wardrobe!

The reality of the 'born-again' experience is far from that and denotes a new spiritual awareness and declares that one's old life has died and a new life has begun because the new, God given, life is just that!

'A new life' with nothing of the old in it at all.

We are not just a changed person able to attract others to us by the change they see in our behaviour! We are a 'new creation,' created in Christ Jesus to bring forth fruit for God.

It is not always a conspicuous place to which we are appointed and quite often, we are given the role of servants, called to 'serve' where we are, using the gifts God has given us.

Our allegiance is to His cause and yes, it may give us a cross to carry, sometimes even at the first intimation to the world that we are followers of Christ. However, our Lord was very much aware of this and because of it asked us to 'count the cost.' Luke 14:28-30.

Not to be afraid of being a follower of Him, but to 'count the cost.'

He said. 'He that is ashamed of me, and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed when He comes.' Luke 9:26.

An old hymn underlines our stand.

Dare to be a Daniel.
Dare to stand alone.
Dare to take the Name of Christ.
And dare to make it known!

It is a personal decision!

Each one of us will have to weigh the matter up and decide for ourselves whether we are prepared to go through with it or not.

If one gives the matter serious thought it will soon be seen that the issue is, 'Do I really believe?'

No one who really believes in the promises of God is going to exchange them for the transient pleasures of this life.

Moses made the right choice and, 'rather than enjoy the treasures of Egypt for a season,' he chose the reproach of Christ.' Hebrews 11:25-26.

Anyone who thinks that they can live both ways live under a terrible delusion. It is their 'opinion' against the 'sure Word of God! Indeed our assurance of Eternal Life can only be based on the promises of God, and these promises are all conditional.

The sad result of Israel's failure to comply with those given them can be read in the history of their past and their state today.

However, the Gentiles have little cause to boast in any of these things, and the Christian has none!

They were all set forth as our examples, and if we fail to keep the conditions given us we have no claim on the promises either. I Corinthians 10:11.

So! What are these conditions?

Well, for a beginning, they are not burdensome!

The first thing we must do however is to recognize, and admit that by our very nature we are rebellious against anything we see as a 'law' or a 'commandment' suggested to us by any authority!

Adam was the first to rebel and that rebellious nature has passed upon all men and women, so that our first reaction to the wishes of God, whether we see them as good for us or not, is to say, 'No!'

This is disobedience, and such disobedience against what is 'right' God calls 'sin'.

It is the cause of our wilfulness to do things in our own way whether it is good for others or not.

It is why we are separated from God and 'lost.'

'By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.' Romans 5:12.

We seldom even try and attain to the high calling God has called us to. We 'fall short.'
Romans 3:23.

What then is the answer?

First be 'big' enough to recognize this wilfulness in our 'make-up', and see the gulf that lies between us and God.

Then read the Word of God and see how Jesus Christ has paid the debt of disobedience, (death), for us.

How He has redeemed us from our 'lost' state by dying in our stead, and how this sacrifice He made has purchased eternal life for us if we believe.

Now there is no great demand upon us to do anything personally other than to believe He did die in our place and that we enter now into a completely new life.

Everyone has the free will to believe and accept this, or reject it.

There are no demands that you must do it, only a loving desire that you will accept this 'new life' to be found in Christ and 'live it' with our Father in love and harmony.

I John 3:18 has this, 'My little children. Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed, and in truth!' How else?

It is no more or less than what we would want to do for anyone we love, we would want to do what pleases them. Would you not do all you could to please the one you love, the one who loves you?

It's not possible to imagine any other course!

None of us would say 'yes' with our mouths and not do those things that prove our love is from our own choice! And, where the Scriptures speak of obedience, they speak of that kind of loving obedience, that is, to do what we know will please the one who loves us so that our mutual love will grow stronger day by day.

Any other response is but the assent of our lips, for if our heart is not in our promises there is little chance of us ever carrying them out.

It is self evident that if our response to anything is sincere then our resulting action will show the depth of that belief.

The Scriptures point to the fact that 'devils believe and tremble,' and it is interesting to search the Word of God and note how many times the spirits recognized and acknowledged Christ as the Son of God.

Even our own experience of living in this world testifies to the fleeting nature of belief when it lacks real conviction.

Make sure your belief is a belief from the heart.

One may live a 'good life,' or a perfectly moral life. It may be full of 'good works,' and may contain a regular form of religious attendance, but unless it is done because our hearts have responded to God's love and we want to do His will out of love for Him and others, it is only religious and 'profiteth us, or God, nothing.'

The devil will try and tell us something different of course!

Such as, we would not be doing all these things if we did not love God, but our experience in this world tells us, and the Bible affirms, even 'sinners also love those that love them.' Luke 6:32.

Our love needs to have a particular 'quality' in it and that 'quality' is the love of God Himself. It needs to 'speak of Him through us,' not of ourselves.

During our Lord's walk on this earth He came against this problem time and time again with the spiritual leaders of Israel.

They failed to see that their actions were self righteous, that actions done merely for the sake of being right, or appearing right, were useless, and they failed to see their error, because they could not humble themselves enough to be taught.

THE FIERY TRIAL

Every soul who takes a stand for Christ and is truly Converted becomes a 'new creation,' a new being, and is going to face a 'fiery trial!'

'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice! Inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy.' 1 Peter 4:12.

Of course those who have merely been converted from moral sin to moral righteousness will not see this. They will continue to live their life almost as before except for the fact that they will obey the law.

Paul was that kind of man before he was converted and even persecuted others with a sense of righteousness because he was doing earnestly what the law prescribed. He says so in his account of his life, but when he encountered Christ on the way to Damascus how it all changed, the law was now obeyed from the heart, and by the spirit, not by the letter. It changed him completely and in doing so brought him persecution in turn from those who were once his own.

Paul wrote with feeling about his new stance and his old one.

'Touching the righteousness which is in the law I was blameless.' He declares and counted that righteousness, 'but loss' when he found the righteousness which is to be found' through the faith of Christ. The righteousness which is of God by faith.' Philippians 3:6-9.

Therefore I repeat, every follower of the Lord Jesus Christ will experience a trial once they stand for Christ because, of necessity, they have 'turned their back' on the world, the flesh, and the devil and, all who continue to serve these things, at once become their enemies!

We must be careful of course that our 'fiery trial' is not self inflicted!

That is we must be careful not to provoke others to enmity by being over zealous in areas which only recently held for us the same attractions we now see so wrong in them!

And another important thing also emerges in this new relationship we have with our Heavenly Father!

He, like an earthly father, is going to rebuke and chasten us when we step out of the path He has laid out for us! Two great Scriptures both encourage and admonish us in this area, one being found in Romans and the other in Hebrews.

'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.' Romans 8:16-17.

'Whom the LORD loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every one whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as children, for what child is it whom the father chasteneth not?' Hebrews 12:6-7.

It is for our growth and guidance, and it certainly is never pleasant! However as the writer of Hebrews goes on to say, if one is changed by it, it will 'bring forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness,' for it is part of the 'trial of faith.'

Peter writes of it in 1 Peter 1:7, and the 'gold tried in the fire' of Job 23:10 speaks of the same experience.

All who have made up their mind to live the godly life found in Christ will suffer a trial of some kind.

Oh! It may not be the bodily persecution so many saints suffered, even to their death, in the tumultuous times of Rome, in the days of the Inquisition, or the more recent times of witch hunting and reformation, but it will hurt!

For all that, Paul sounds this note of triumph for us when he writes to Timothy. 'Out of them all will the Lord deliver us.' as He did for Paul himself. 2 Timothy 3:10-12.

Our Lord warned His disciples of this and it holds as true today for us all!

'If the world hate you.' He said. 'Know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love you.' John 15:18.

And we are no longer of the world even though we live in it.

Indeed Paul puts it very clearly when he write.

'We are fools for Christ's sake' , because that is the world's opinion of us. I Corinthians 4:10.

Now anyone who has not encountered this might be inclined to think that this could be a very humiliating experience, and indeed it could be if the ridicule or persecution is taken as a personal affront rather than as an affront to Christ and, it is clear, that those who mock our faith in Him do so to degrade the Gospel of Christ.

However quite the reverse is true because the joy of knowing one has definitely been recognized as a devout follower makes us realise from what depths of darkness we have been saved and puts in our own heart the desire to reach others who are still ignorantly walking in the blindness from which we have been delivered. It is here that we require a tact that is normally beyond us.

We forget what our own response was once to the same call, and believing the obvious difference in our walk will change others from their way, quite often, zealously but without thought, urge them to 'give up' this or that, or exhort them to find a 'Christ' they have not yet even begun to understand and, although they need to find, as we did, a 'better life,' a 'different life,' a life without 'pressures,' the way is not all that clear to them.

And it does not become clear perhaps until their need becomes desperate, or until someone who loves Christ is able to gently lead them to His door. Misdirected zeal can quite often turn them away, and they will remain enemies, both of us and the Gospel, continuing to walk with and 'love their own.' John 15:19.

Of course, if we are still 'flirting' with the world, none of these Scriptures will be seen so clearly by us, because the position of the godly and the ungodly has never changed, nor can it, they will always war against one another.

It has always been so and Paul reveals this when, writing of Esau and Jacob, one the son of the flesh, and one the son of promise, he penned these words.

'As it was then, he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the spirit, even as it is now.' Galatians 4:29.

Obedience is the key once again and we know we are His children when we are both obedient and if we suffer chastening when we are disobedient. It is something both to be learned and delighted in for it reveals the truth of our adoption. He, our heavenly Father, is treating us as He treated His own Son.

Opposition, or at least resistance, will come to those who stand for Christ, and are obedient to His Word and one can rejoice indeed, if these are our portion, because we have been accounted worthy to suffer for His sake and our names are written in heaven.

If however we are suffering and finding no peace at all in the situation we are in, perhaps we are suffering only for our own faults and not on His behalf at all, or maybe because our pride has been hurt when the efforts we are making seem to be getting nowhere!

It calls for thorough self examination so that all our efforts will be Christ directed.

Directed so that He may be able to use us, not we Him!

There is no satisfaction at all in a mission that fails even when we have done all that we could!

He doesn't want suffering, or unnecessary sacrifice either!

He would have obedience, rather than sacrifice.

'Hath the LORD a great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, rather than in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold to obey is better than sacrifice!' I Samuel 15:22.

And of course obedience leads to the trial of our faith, and that trial truly proven, brings forth the fruit of which Paul wrote.

'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, and against such there is no law, and they that are Christ s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.' Galatians 5:22-25.

The fruit is as certain as the trial!

However the trial itself is not a trial to be avoided, 'as though some strange thing had happened,' as Peter told us when we began this chapter, for God is 'with us' and He has made it quite clear in His Word that these trials come because we have declared that we belong to Him.

So, having no love for God, the world has no love for us either, but for all that we can rejoice, because God has provided a 'way of escape' for us so that we 'shall not be tried' above that which we are able.' 1 Corinthians 10:13.

Yes! Sometimes the 'Cross' is hard to bear!

The Way is narrow!

It is 'rough and steep' at times!

No! It is not pleasant to be deserted by friends.

It is not pleasant to have those who were once our close companions, or our business friends, avoid us, but the very fact that it does happen when we are 'whole hearted' for Christ proves both the depth of our convictions, and the lack of their own.

If the Christian life has no measure of opposition in it at all there is something wrong and one may be absolutely sure that one is not following Christ in the 'narrow way' which leads to eternal life with Him.

Remember, except one be 'born from above' one cannot enter the Kingdom of God, and it is only when we are born of the Spirit, and obedient to the Scriptures, that they become real.

Are they real to you?

If not, one thing is certain. You are not 'born of the Spirit.'

Of course the Christian life is not all persecution.

It is not all suffering.

And neither are the persecutions and sufferings we may be called upon to endure personal afflictions!

They are, above all, sufferings and persecutions against Christ, which we are sharing, and with them comes the blessed assurance which all who are His have, love, peace, confidence, joy, and a power to overcome which the world can neither give, nor understand, nor take away!

Have you forgotten?

Are you trying to carry the burden yourself and alone?

He is waiting to take your burden from you if you will let Him.

He is the 'way of escape.' 1 Corinthians 10:13.

The Christian walk is a joyous walk. And with Christ indwelling us, we become more aware each day just how wonderful our Heavenly Father really is.

How true is His Word!.

How beautiful His Creation over which He has given us dominion.

Truly,

'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that' we should walk in them' Ephesians 2:10.

WISDOM

'Let no man deceive himself! If any among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. It is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.' 1 Corinthians 3:18-19.

A little thought makes it clear that this means neither 'ignorance is bliss', nor that all knowledge is useless!

It is recorded to turn our minds to the only place where true wisdom can be found.

God Himself!

'If any of you lack wisdom, let him, ask of God who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. Do not err! Every good gift and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights,' who never changes. James 1:5.16-17.

All we are, all we have, all we expect to be is to be found in our God, the fount of all things.

'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, and only fools despise wisdom and understanding.' Proverbs 1:7.

Now neither wisdom nor knowledge necessarily come from being learned although none would deny that if learning is tempered with humility, and if the ability to teach is acknowledged as the gift of God, then understanding comes with it.

Those who have never had access to knowledge can find the evidence of God's hand in the visible things of Creation all about them and the advantage the learned have is that they can read the Word of God also.

All therefore can find the Truth if they really search for it.

Of course knowledge, just knowledge, sought for its own sake or for gain in this world, has no real value at all and in the end dies in the ashes of its own burnt out dreams.

It holds no promise in the life here.

It does not concern itself in the life to come.

It can have no further future than the end to which it is directed in this world.

It is self destructive!

Ignorance. Content with living an unthinking life of permanent bliss in a world that offers everything, has no better end.

Both these attitudes leave unthinking minds open, ready victims to men and women who for power, or prestige, or just plain gain, capture us with grand concepts that have no factual basis and make us party to their own greed.

Sometimes it is for an ideal which has enthralled them and, seeing it is impossible to achieve it from their personal effort alone, they seek to draw as many after them as they can in a desperate effort to fulfill their impossible vision.

Sometimes, sadly, they are those who have set themselves against God to lead others as blind as themselves to fall into the same ditch.

We do not have to look far to put names to such people for the events which follow them are history. Men and women alike bringing national discontent, social chaos, and finally death and deadly destruction because they are drunk with fanaticism, blind with patriotism, or religious fervour!

God warns us of them!

'From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not of your lusts which war in yourselves? You want and have not! You desire to have and you kill when you cannot! And still you have not, because you never ask! And when you do ask you ask for such- wrong reasons that you still do not receive what you ask! You have forgotten that friendship with the world is enmity with God.' James 4:1-4.

God records for us in Romans 1 20-22 that the 'things which are made' tell of Him daily and while they may appear to be simple things it will be these simple things which will defy the wisdom of man to explain, bringing their knowledge to nothing.

'The natural man, (of whom we wrote earlier), receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.' I Corinthians 2:14.

This is why it is possible for simple souls, who are wholly surrendered to God, to have more knowledge of the truth revealed to them by the Holy Spirit in twelve months, than those who are learned, yet not surrendered, in years of study. In fact the latter could be even further from the truth at the end of their study than when they started because they have ignored the only true source of revelation, the Word of God, and the only interpreter of it, the Holy Spirit.

This does not mean we can ignore the Word, or instruction, or guidance from others as some have urged because of the following passage in John's first letter. 'The anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you.' I John 2:27.

It does not mean we do not need teaching!

It means that while there is no doubt that the Holy Spirit will lead us unto all truth if we are wholly surrendered to Christ our Lord, we have also been given the tremendous gift of being able to discern the difference between the Spirit of Christ and the spirit of antichrist, for there are many deceivers come into the world who would seek to draw us away from the truth we have found in Him, urging us to trust them, and follow the way they have interpreted the Scriptures.

That is why we need to depend on the guidance of those spirit filled believers who live about us, or who have gone before us, because in them we have the surety that our faith, as theirs, need never be shaken.

There are many Scriptures which make it quite clear that we should not only be able to teach but that we should seek to be taught, but the two passages following will suffice I am sure.

'Thou therefore my son, be strong in the grace that is in Jesus Christ, and the things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men who shall be able to teach others also!' 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

'When the time is come that ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as need milk and not strong meat.' Hebrews 5:12.

As for the surety of our faith, the writer of Hebrews not only states that it is the substance, or seal, or our 'title deeds' to all we have hoped for, but spends the whole chapter writing down the evidence of answered faith so that we need have no doubts at all! Hebrews 11.

No! We do not have to be learned to find Christ and our way back to God, but we must believe in Him.

'Without faith it is impossible to please Him. For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' Hebrews 11:6.

What a promise!

Because, as we continue trusting in the Holy Spirit's guidance while we study His Word, or learn from the lips of others who are His, we will grow in the grace, and wisdom, and knowledge that comes 'from above.'

We will have that ability to discern the Truth from error and therefore will not be led astray by those of whom we are now about to learn.

It is true, unfortunately, that many, perhaps millions, have been led astray by false doctrine, false sects, and false teachers, who tell them how to obtain what they want in some 'easier' way than has been ordained for them by God, offering them answers that in the end only satisfy the flesh!

Peter describes them as follows!

'There shall be false teachers among you who would privily bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them. They will bring upon themselves swift destruction but many will follow their teaching and for this reason even the Truth will be evil spoken of.' 2 Peter 2:1-2.

Our daily newspapers see this fulfilled to the letter, for many false prophets have entered the world in these latter days.

We must not think that because someone is earnest, or even religious, that they are true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Many even stand in the pulpit today, preaching a Gospel that is easy to listen to but tainted by the world.

Some are 'good men' but unconverted.

Others are captured by the power it gives!

Only concerned with telling their followers the things they want to hear, so that they can hold onto the power they have.

They have 'erred from the faith.

They love this present world!

Remember the great blessing God has granted us in that we are able through His Spirit to discern truth from error, if only we will exercise it.

'Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits to see whether they be of God because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God! Every Spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God!' I John 4:1-21.

If you doubt them, test them by His Word.

Satan has had over six thousand years experience in deceiving us all and unless we are 'born of the Spirit' and trust in the Word of God we are easy victims to his deceptive ways!

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

One of the areas into which our own wisdom can, and often does lead us, is Spiritism, probably born out of a desire to see into the future so that one may have an advantage in the world not available to others. For financial security, personal power, success in this world, to avoid danger, or some other personal reason.

It has nothing of God in it!

In fact He is not welcome as He would probably somehow prevent us from obtaining our desires!

Multitudes see no harm in the 'reading of the stars', in fact literally millions of people daily depend upon, halfheartedly believe in, or are amusedly interested in, the columns which appear week by week in a variety of publications which collectively reach into almost every home in the world.

They fail to see that they are being drawn insidiously into a dependance upon an art which has been frowned upon by God from its very beginning, and because they gradually come to depend upon the encouragement they draw from these forecasts of their future activities, their lives are inevitably being shaped towards 'living out' that future!

If it were true that we could divide the billions of people on the earth into specific types, and know just what action they were likely to engage in daily, and what employment they were best suited for, any one of the ideologies which throng our world today would long ago have grasped hold with eager hands upon such a concept.

It would be the ideal way to have faithful followers who would work towards the end their own ideology envisaged because they would only follow the path laid out for them and no other!

If this were true our pathway in this world would be hopeless!

We could do nothing but just fulfill the destiny those signs pointed to! How ridiculous and degrading!

In contrast look at the promise Jesus made to us! 'If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed, and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free! If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed!' John 8:31.32.36.

God has created us so that we have the 'free will' to decide for ourselves whether we want to follow Him or not.

He wants us! He loves us with a Father's love! But He wants us to choose for ourselves not be 'made' to do so.

Freedom to choose no matter what the circumstances!

No matter who you are!

Not conformity!

It seems extremely odd that people who are not willing to believe that God even exists are so anxious to seek after supernatural signs to determine their future!

However, it must be obvious that this supernatural power they look to for daily guidance is not God's way.

Is it supernatural?

What other conclusion can we draw from the fact that so many blindly trust this means of telling the future?

Then who is directing them to this source?

Surely it is clear that it is Satan himself!

Therefore. No matter how harmless these practices seem, they are far from harmless.

It is one of the methods he uses to deceive and confuse us!

We are warned all the way through the Old Testament.

Also in the New although it is not always as obvious there.

We must not depend upon these things.

It is clear that those who seek divination run the awful risk of eternal separation from God!

Whether it be from readings in the 'cup', or the 'stars' or from witches, familiar spirits, curious arts, sorcery, or 'times', or any other 'thing.'

Whether it be for knowledge, or to know the future, or for any other personal advantage.

Our Lord has a word to say about the future. He said.

'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons', and He made it clear in whose Hands that future lay when He continued with the words, 'which the Father hath put in His own power!' Acts 1:7. He never meant us to be worried about the future although very much aware of the present and the end of all things.

He urged us time and time again to spend our days in seeking for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and the future would take care of itself.

Those who are truly seeking for God are not overly concerned about the future although they are also urged to do those things necessary to provide for the well being of their family.

This is just plain common sense!

But those who are seeking to know the future so that they might have an advantage in this world have fallen into the snare of putting the material things of the world before the spiritual, and their treasure, however large it may become, will one day have to be left behind.

Throughout history false prophets, trying to make gain out of individuals, or nations, have prophesied 'good things' and because they have always put the day of reckoning as far into the future as possible they have often succeeded in their deception.

Some have even made good 'guesses', or have been clever enough to discern the trend of events and calculate a logical conclusion which has proved to come true, but God has recorded for us the mark by which we should know the true prophet and whether he is speaking for God or not.

'If thou say in thine heart. How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken?'

Here is the answer!

'When a prophet speaketh in the Name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken. The prophet hath spoken it presumptuously. Thou shalt not be afraid of him!' Deuteronomy 18:21-22.

God gave the following commands to Israel through Moses because of their desire to look beyond the day, and past the grave, and because they had not yet seen their future was safe in His Hands.

'The soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards to go after them. I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people.' Leviticus 20:6.

Deuteronomy 18:10-13 adds to that.

'There shall not be found among you anyone, that useth divination, observes times, enchantments, familiar spirits or necromancers. For all who do these things are an abomination unto the LORD.'

God's Word to them in Isaiah and Ezekiel tells not only of their end, but how they have led others to follow the same path of destruction. Isaiah 47:10-14. Ezekiel 13:6.

Their only hope was to be found in that they would repent of their ways and turn back to God. Isaiah 8:19.

The Old Testament clearly says that those who seek these forbidden things shall be 'cut-off' from God, and just as clearly the New Testament points out that those who used similar methods did it for personal gain, or power, and that their motives were evil.

It caused Paul a great deal of trouble in Philippi. He writes.

'It came to pass as we went to prayer that a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much gain by soothsaying.' Acts 16:16.

Distressed, Paul in the name of Jesus, delivered her from the spirit which troubled her, and although those who had been getting 'much gain' from her, managed to have Paul and Silas put in prison, it led to the salvation of the jailer and his household that same night!

In Samaria, the man Simon used sorcery to 'bewitch', and the people said he was a 'great one', believing he was filled with the power of God. However, when he saw the marvellous things which happened when the apostles preached the Kingdom of God and told of Jesus Christ, and how

believers received the Holy Ghost when they were baptized, he offered money so that he might receive the same power too.

Peter gave him the only answer he could give when he said, 'Thy money perish with thee because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.' Acts 8:9-24.

And in Corinth, after the 'seven sons of Sceva' were defeated in their purpose when they used the Name of Jesus, (although they did not believe in Him), to try and cast out evil spirits. 'Many of them also who had used curious arts brought their books together and burned them before all men.' Acts 19:13-19.

The word for 'curious arts', (Gk. periergos), is the same word Paul uses when warning Timothy against 'busy-bodies.' I Timothy 5:13.

Yes, all 'these things' are contrary to the Gospel of Christ and yet today we can see those who once would never have thought of abbling in anything doubtful, because of their respect for God and His Word, now casually, sometimes openly, defying Him in doing those very things He warned against.

In the grip of satan with a carelessness that makes one shudder.

There is no doubt that they are fulfilling Paul's words to Timothy to the letter. It is truly both wonderful and, at the same time, terrible to read his words!

'Now the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.' I Timothy 4:1.

God has given us a free will to decide for ourselves but at the same time He has clearly defined the two ways and where each one leads.

Listen to His words in Deuteronomy.

'The Lord thy God is one LORD' Deuteronomy 6:4-7.

'Behold I have set before you this day blessing and cursing.' Deuteronomy 11:26-28.

'Thou shalt not hearken unto the voice of those who call you to follow other gods.' Deuteronomy 13:1-4.

'Therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live.' Deuteronomy 30:10-19.

He has given us warnings, and also encouraged us by showing us what 'an incorruptible inheritance' we do have.

He has sent His Son so that we can have this eternal future.

If we ignore these priceless gifts we are only helping to fulfill prophecy itself!

It would be foolish for us to sow thistles at seed time and expect a crop of wheat at harvest and in the same way it is foolish of us to sow carelessness, or evil, and expect profit at the end of time.

We simply 'reap what we sow.' Galatians 6:7.

But these times are the times we live in, millions being drawn away to follow a way that satisfies them 'now'.

They are an easy prey to the smooth tongued deceiver and have come to the place where 'they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers who will turn away their ears from the truth and turn them into fables.' 2 Timothy 4:3.

And, 'because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall wax cold,' Matthew 24:12. Our Lord also warns us. 'There shall arise false Christ's and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect!' Matthew 24:24.

If then the 'very elect' will find these coming times difficult, where will the 'lukewarm' stand?

We, of course, need to 'reach out' to those who we see walking in 'ways' that only 'seem right' before it is too late for them, and we need to watch our own path that we do not stumble either.

Our Lord said, 'Take ye heed! Watch and pray, for ye know not when the time is. I say unto all. Watch!' Mark 13:33,37.

We know the Kingdom of God is 'nigh at hand', because not only have we seen the 'fig tree', (Israel), put forth fruit and become a nation, but 'all the trees' putting forth their leaves also. Luke 21:29-30.

HISTORY

It is fascinating to search through the Bible and trace, as it were, the 'growing-up' of the human race from birth to what we see today as our 'coming of age.'

It is as though we are looking at the progress of our own families, and as we read the Scriptures and see the response the millions who have thronged the world have made to God through the centuries, we can recognise many of the strengths and weaknesses of our own children.

Think upon it for a brief moment.

The child ready to learn of life, with no knowledge of either wrong or right, needing guidance to discern the good things from the bad.

Causing us pain when they obstinately refuse correction.

Giving us joy by being obedient to our teaching and eagerly pressing on into the 'better' way!

Our sorrow when they will not.

Our despair when they threaten to depart.

Our longing for them if they go.

The happiness when they not only obey, but they want to obey because they love us, and so trust our guidance, that they fiercely cling to our word and follow our example despite any outside influence which tries to draw them away.

We see all of these things in the first few chapters of the Bible.

First, Adam and Eve, innocent and curious, but curious above obedience, losing every blessing, to find toil and heartache, because they could not resist the call to self satisfaction.

Next, in a world governed by the desires rather than by the conscience, the voice of the tempter comes clearer than the call of God, and just like his parents the rebellious Cain took that next step, and the murder of Abel was the ultimate cost.

'Freedom at any cost' brought a dreadful price, for the evil thus loosed ran riot, and although God spoke to them through those who remained faithful to Him, most disregarded His Call until only a 'handful' remained.

It was from this handful God now called out Noah, 'a man of grace' to lead them into a new era, with a new covenant, and a new approach to His Creation, but this failed also.

Again they challenged God for dominion when they discovered the pleasures which lay in the power He had given them and, desiring to use that power for their own selfish ends, they foolishly built up a tower in an attempt to reach up, find, and confront Him!

For all this He never abandoned them indeed, on the contrary, He provided, in every instance, a 'way back.'

The promise to our first parents was of salvation through the 'seed of the woman.' Genesis 3:15.

The second way, in the 'acceptable' offering and the 'rejected' one, was simply 'to do what is right and be accepted.' Genesis 4:7.

The third, (even though the preaching of Noah for a hundred and twenty years before the flood, did not cause them either to repent or change), was that God would not again curse the ground rather, 'while the earth remained, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night,' would never cease. Genesis 8:21-22.

And after their dispersion at Babel, He called them to follow Him in Faith through His servant Abraham, promising they would be blessed above all creatures. Genesis 12:2-3.

We can see the same patterns in our lives today.

And, although I risk 'labouring the point,' I would like to draw attention to how our Heavenly Father does 'tend and keep us' even if we so often fail to see it.

He must be hungering for us to 'be quiet' and see His purpose, as much as we wish our children could see that the reason we correct them is because of our love for them!

We tell our child what to do and we glow with a sense of pride when they do exactly as we ask them to do without question.

We know it is because they love and trust us.

Enoch must have been like that.

How we suffer when we know that, despite our warnings, they are going to take a way which will lead to suffering and heartache. What pain it is when like Adam and Eve they take that way and we have no remedy for them.

How we agonize when, caught up in a 'mood' or a 'way', they suffer the consequences and, unwilling to surrender their way because of pride or rebellion, go on to further hurt or shame, as did Cain.

How wonderful when we are able to offer a remedy and they accept it, and are restored to our trust.

How we love and long for them when they are 'afar off' from us, and in despair or pain, or both.

How we long for them to 'see' us waiting as Noah saw God was waiting.

It's even worse if we see them proudly draw away again to follow their own inclinations, and how our patience sometimes fails sadly under the strain.

It makes us realise just how 'long suffering' God is in dealing with us because we must try His patience sorely. Yet He is not only ready to forgive us but has Himself given us all an entrance into the 'everlasting promise' He made to Abraham.

Abraham! A man of such faith that today if we show the same faith we are to be accounted, because of that covenant, 'heirs with him' and friends of God through what the promised 'Seed' has accomplished on the cross.

A look at the sevenfold promise fulfilled in Christ is worth our examination at this point. It is found in Genesis 12:1-3 and made to Abraham at the time God told him to leave his father's house and go into a 'strange land.'

Hebrews 11 records this with a sense of awe, for Abraham went, 'not knowing whither he went, and without question' to a land where, instead of having great wealth, he 'lived i n tents' with his sons and their sons, believing in the promises against what appeared to be all reason.

Here are the promises.

1. I will make of thee a great nation.
2. I will bless thee.
3. I will make thy name great.
4. Thou shalt be a blessing.
5. I will bless them that bless thee.
6. I will curse them that curseth thee.
7. In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Galatians reveals not only the fulfillment of the promises but the reward of belief in God's promises.

To all who exercise the same faith, both then and now.

'Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith the same are the children of Abraham, and the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.' Galatians 3:6-9.

Paul writes, 'The just shall live by faith. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ.'

And, speaking of His death on the cross for our sins, reveals it is because of this, 'we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.' Galatians 3:14.

That is not all!

Certainly it was to Abraham and his seed that the promises were made, and that seed was Christ, but we are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus and, 'if ye be Christ's, then ye are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.' Galatians 3:16-29.

Abraham, the seed of Shem, believed, and his faith was passed on to Isaac, and Jacob. They too followed in their fathers footsteps, and from them God moulded a people to be the keepers of His Word and the vessels through whom His Promise would finally be fulfilled.

They were to become known as Israel!

Yes! It was in 'that worm' Jacob after he 'wrestled,' as it were, with God, that Israel was born, and a nation arose.

Not a 'strong' people!

In fact a people holding many of the weaknesses of their father Jacob!

However, they inherited his tenacious faith and God 'chose' them to be His people through whom His strength should be shown.

His Word, from here, tells mostly of His dealings with them.

Not that the strangers were left out if they wanted to find God, and Israel is really a people in whom we can see ourselves again.

Good intentions and at the same time strangely selfish hearts.

Willing minds and weak flesh.

Faith and faithlessness.

Victories and defeats seemingly our daily portion.

Like children we know, or have known, who have become of age and are independent.

Some are willing to follow the footsteps of their parents, others determined to live their own lives and walk defiantly in the opposite direction until sadly and finally we see them in bondage again to the world.

This is where Israel finally succumbed to self indulgence and became bond slaves to the world under the Pharaoh who followed after Joseph's Pharaoh, and there they remained until God raised up a man called Moses to lead them out of their slavery to the freedom promised to Abraham 430 years before.

They accepted their deliverance with joy but their ready promises to follow God were soon forgotten when their longing for the things they missed, and their desire for something better than what they had, took too long to come.

And when they discovered they still had to work for the things they wanted, the self discipline they needed to continue that one step more, the patience to wait for the sure promise evaporated, and they began to murmur against the judgements Moses made when they did wrong, and asked for a 'set of instructions' from God which they promised to obey.

I suppose any of us, either as parents or because we have been in charge of some project ourselves, have had that same request made to us also.

'You tell us what to do and what not to do, and we will do as you say.'

It is the cry of those who know they do not have the strength of purpose to do what is right of themselves, and stems from the desire to escape the responsibility that comes with decision.

They say they are willing to obey a set of rules but in promising to do so forget that those rules can only be successful if they are obeyed 'from the heart.'

The weaklings have two ways out.

They can say.

'I did what I was told and only what I was told and the one who told me is responsible if anything went wrong!'

They can declare, when they didn't do their part, even though the way was obvious.

'I didn't do it because I wasn't told to.'

It is clear that a way around any law is available if only the 'letter of the law' is followed, and it is just as clear that our response to those laws, whether they be civil laws or God's wishes, must be obeyed from the heart to be effective.

For instance even the apparently straightforward, 'Thou shalt not steal,' if carried out according to the 'letter of the law', is not broken if we encourage or pay someone to steal for us, and that one example can be extended to almost any situation.

In any case this is what did happen amongst Israel and they became adept at side stepping the Law God gave them through Moses whenever they wanted to.

Of course they were as equally insistent about obeying it when convenient but, in effect, the law failed to reveal either the true character of God to them or the certainty of His Promises.

It was meant to be, as Paul expressed it, 'A schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ,' so that when Christ did appear they would recognise the true fulfillment of God's righteousness in Him but they failed to acknowledge this when the time actually came. Galatians 3:24.

'For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God.' 2 Corinthians 1:20.

This time of dependence upon a law to justify their behaviour spanned an immense part of history and indeed they are still held in its bondage today having failed to see the promise of God, to Adam and Eve in the Garden, fulfilled in the coming of Christ Jesus at that 'appointed time' in history.

He who came 'to confirm the promises made to the fathers,' Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the prophets.

The Promise first given to them, and at their rejection of Him, to 'all nations.' Romans 15:8-9.

How Christ yearned for them, and after John the Baptist prepared the way He went out preaching the same message that John had declared.

'Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!' Matthew 4:17.

And Luke records how He first sent out twelve disciples, and later seventy, to 'go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and tell them the same good news.' Luke 9:1-2 and Luke 10:1-3.

It was not enough, and any of us who have had children and had them reject our offer of reconciliation would know how the heart of God Himself must have hurt!

Three years later, even though Jesus rode into Jerusalem as their king in fulfillment of prophecy, they rejected Him, crucified Him, disregarded the gift of forgiveness He offered through the grace of God, and remained entangled in the Law.

The 'veil still over their heart.'

So the Promise of blessing to all nations through the 'seed' of Abraham was offered to those nations, accepted gladly, and a new era of what can only be called 'Grace' entered into the world!

Now, for all those who believe Christ Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise made in the Garden, that He is the one through whom the victory is found over Satan, that He did pay, on the cross, the debt demanded by disobedience, death, there has come a new freedom.

An inner peace, a new beginning, a new way of life, a life which matters now, and holds the promise of eternal life to come.

Not condemnation to come!

No!

Those who believe in Him and in what He has done for them, have already been delivered from the wrath of God. It is only those who fail to accept this gift of God who must one day stand before the Great White Throne in judgment.

Certainly we all face 'a judgement,' but for those 'in Christ' it is the judgment so beautifully described in Corinthians, one which recognises our deliverance from the judgment of condemnation.

Paul, even as he rejoices with us in the deliverance which we have, reminds us of the obligations which come with it.

The faith we have found, as we have seen before, brings with it 'gifts', or talents of various kinds and, if we do not use these to their full advantage by building better lives for ourselves and others, we are not building to our full potential.

It may not be easily recognised here in this world but one day, when we meet Christ again, it will become evident that we did not build enough, perhaps we didn't build at all, and while we shall be saved because it is our faith in what Christ has done which saves us, we will also be ashamed when we see the quality of the buildings we have built or the things we have left undone.

Keep in mind then what Paul writes.

First.

'Neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and everyone shall receive his own reward according to his own labour. For we are labourers together with God.' I Corinthians 3:7-9.

Then.

Paul goes on to say that now we know we are God's creation and His workmanship we need to begin building ourselves. However we can only build on the foundation which God has provided, that is Jesus Christ himself, and when we build on this truth, what we build, whatever we build, will be revealed at that time, whether it be 'gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble.'

The intent of his words are clear.

What we build will show its worth by its ability to survive any trials it may encounter.

We are 'workers together' and all we do shall one day be known, 'for the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved.' I Corinthians 3:8-15.

Yes we live in a time of Grace but how long that 'time' is to last no one knows, although there have been many through the centuries, and in our own day, who have tried to determine its end.

Always to their discomfort, confusion and shame because, as our Lord said to His disciples on the day he ascended.

'It is not for you to know the times or seasons which God hath put in His own power.' Acts 1:7.

This does not mean we should ignore the certainty of His return even if we do not know the time, therefore, as He asks us in His Word, we should be busy in His work 'being witnesses' wherever we are able, and if we can.

Expecting Him? Yes!

And working as though it might still yet be 'today!' Acts 1:6-8.

For! These days are special 'times' and we are living 'in them.'

We are not living in the past now nor according to our own conscience.

We are not living under a 'set of rules' which we can manipulate to our own sense of right and wrong.

We are living under the direction of the Holy Ghost who encourages us to use our hearts when we make decisions.

When we meet up with others in adversity.

When we find them lost in this tumultuous world.

So that they, with us, will find this new life in Christ which He has purchased for us all 'with His own blood.' Acts 20:28.

And we need to be urgent about it also knowing that the time is set for, whether it be near or far away, the day is here now when those who need God must find Him, not tomorrow.

'Take heed to call upon Him today while it is still today, if ye will hear His voice.' Hebrews 3:7-15.

'The night is far spent and the day is 'at hand!' Romans 13:12.

Grace must soon give way to judgment and we know this because, the 'sure word of prophecy', as a 'light that shineth into a dark place', assures us that it is so. 2 Peter 1:19.

THE LAST WORD

Without wishing to add to the already immense volume of books on the 'last days' I must at least state my position in this area, which is that I am a pre-millennialist, one who looks for the Lord's Coming and expects Him daily.

This does not 'say it all' of course for there are many who believe as earnestly as I do in the Lord's Coming without necessarily being in the Pre-Millennial position, so I must further add that it means that I believe there is to be a thousand year reign on this earth by Christ with His saints. Jude 14, before the judgement of the Great White Throne.

'They lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. This is the first resurrection, and Satan was loosed and he and his armies compassed the camp of the saints and were defeated. Blessed and holy are they which have part in the first resurrection for on such the second death hath no power.' Revelation 20:4.6.7.9.

The 'second death' has reference to those who are raised after the thousand year reign of Christ with His saints. Revelation 20:5.7.12-14.

Those of whom Christ spoke about before His Transfiguration. Matthew 16:24,28. Mark 8:37-9:1. Luke 9:26-27.

As to those who are the saints.

These are they who have looked for the salvation of God and have found it in Christ.

Some who have died in Him, will come with Him, and those who are alive and awaiting His Coming will be 'caught-up' to join with them as He returns to claim His bride.

'And so shall we ever be with the Lord!' Amen! I Thessalonians 4:17.

Today many seem to spend their time looking for the Anti Christ and proclaiming the imminent doom they see coming upon the earth, rather than proclaiming the blessed hope given to us by our Lord.

I have seen earnest people desperately buying tents, tinned foods, survival kits and other 'things' they hope will keep them safe in the days of trouble they see coming, exhorting others to do the same yet seldom speaking a word for the Christ who has promised to 'save us from the wrath to come.' I Thessalonians 5:9-10.

It is time to remember the sacred charge He did give us and proclaim the salvation of God to be found in Him rather than spend our time in fruitless speculations which only bring fear.

'Go ye therefore.' He said. 'And teach all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' Matthew 28:19-20.

We need to be aware that, since the resurrection, these times are the 'last times' and we should be so sensitive to the danger of the many thousands who are walking, without thought, into an eternal hell without a care, that our time here might be spent telling of the need for salvation, and how its fulfillment can be found in Christ before that 'last day' does close upon us.

It doesn't need more than a 'moment in time' for that to happen either, a person is just as 'lost' if they die 'without Christ' at this moment as they would be if they live to the Day of His Coming and still have not found Him as Saviour.

All the New Testament writers sound the same warning!

'Now is the accepted time!' 2 Corinthians 6:2.

'It is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we first believed.' Romans 13:11-12.

'For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles. Let us go on unto perfection. And this we will do if God permit.' Hebrews 5:12 - 6:3.

Peter reminds us we can be confident of our 'inheritance' which is, 'incorruptible and undefiled, waiting for us in heaven,' I Peter 1:3-5, for we are 'kept by the power of God' but, it is urgent that those who have not yet found Him must find Him, either before 'That Day' or, before the 'things' in

this world draw them after 'the things of the world,' or perhaps death itself overtakes them in its natural course.

The problem for those outside of Christ is that the 'broad way' seems so right!

It appeals to our reason.

Better still, it satisfies.

We generally 'get-along' with others and our pathway is reasonably smooth.

Satan doesn't even bother to disturb us!

But!

Anyone who 'reasons.'

Everyone who is honest with themselves.

They, you perhaps, must feel ill at ease at times when they think about the future, and when you have these feelings, surely the question, 'Which is the Way?', must have come to your mind? It has been asked through the centuries by every honest heart and there is no better answer than that which Jeremiah gives. He wrote.

'Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.'

It is dreadful to hear the answer he received, for they said, just as many do today.

'We will not.' Jeremiah 6:16.

The same situation called our Lord to say, 'Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.' Matthew 7:13-14.

The 'natural' mind is out of harmony with God just as an unfruitful tree is out of harmony with the 'good things' in a garden, and our Lord often used ordinary things like this as illustrations.

In His words in John He reminds us how the branches which do not bear fruit are removed, and in that story we see the end of those who do not, or will not, know Him.

Fortunately the opposite is just as true, for as a branch can only bear fruit when it is healthy and growing strong in the vine, so it is when we live with Him for, in Him, we bear fruit, for Him in the same way. John 15:1-10.

The Scriptures are alive with illustrations that point us to the true Way, the Only Way, and it is God who recorded them there for us.

'Now these things were our examples.'

They were written for our guidance upon whom the 'ends of the world are come.' I Corinthians 10:6-11.

And just as the apostles, disciples, and saints of 2000 years ago preached that 'these times' were upon them, so they are today.

It matters little whether the Lord returns today, or in a thousand years, we need to be 'occupying,' (working), until He does come.

Declaring the Gospel of salvation if we can, and expecting Him daily because, 'Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.' Romans 13:11.

It is He who determines the 'time of the end,' not we, and speculation as to when that time may be is both fruitless and unprofitable.

It is 'His Kingdom' that comes!

Jesus when questioned about the 'time of the end' by His disciples answered their three questions clearly. He said.

'And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.' Matthew 24:6-8.

We have read of the prophecy of Israel's emergence as a nation, and of 'all the nations,' in Luke 21:29-30, and we have seen it happen.

We have read in our daily papers and seen on our television screens the False Christ's who have arisen, and we see daily the travail of famine, disease, and earthquake tearing lives apart all over the world.

We hear rumours of war ever climbing to new heights, and while the leaders speak peace we know they prepare for yet more conflict at the same time.

'All these are the beginning of sorrows,' and makes us sure 'that it is near, even at the door.'
Matthew 24:8-33.

Prophecy of the 'last days' has always been difficult to determine.

All we can be sure of is that they are nearer today than ever before.

The urgency of it all is summed up in the words.

'Today, if ye will hear His voice harden not your hearts.' Hebrews 3:13-14.

Christ has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

'And as it is appointed unto men once to die. Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many and unto them that look for Him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.' Hebrews 9:26-28.

It matters nothing whether death comes at the 'last days' or now, our salvation rests in the fact that our faith is in what has been accomplished by Christ on our behalf.

Peter told us that the Lord does not forget His promises, and is 'not willing that any should perish.' He also added that repentance for our wilful way is needed too, and we should not neglect to do this when we become aware of the need to do so, because the Lord may come one day when we least expect it! 2 Peter 3:9-11.

Paul wrote to Thessalonians that our Lord, 'has not appointed us to wrath but to salvation,' and for this reason also we need to 'Seek the Lord while He may be found.' Isaiah 55:6.

Our hope is in Christ.

A heavenly treasure not an earthly one.

'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.' Colossians 3:1-2.

That same hope compels us to be active, according to our abilities, in declaring it to others, while there is time, despite any opposition we may encounter.

'Little children, it is the last time. Even now are there many anti-christs,' wrote John, and he tells us how to recognise them.

He says they are those who do not believe Jesus Christ came in the flesh, they have the spirit of antichrist in them, and our victory over them is in the fact that, 'greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world.' I John 2:18.1 John 4:1-10.

It is for you to decide whether you will be in that incorruptible kingdom or not.

Our Lord Himself gives the invitation.

'I, Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come! And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will! Let him take the water of life freely!' Revelation 22:16-17.

Here is a glorious inheritance beyond the mind of any to imagine!

It awaits you!

And the bridegroom Himself is waiting for you.

All He asks in return is your love and obedience.

Now I know 'obedience' is not a word easily accepted in these days but that is because we often look upon obedience as servitude instead of seeing it as an equal partnership in a worthy cause.

In fact we seldom hear the word 'obey' in a marriage service these days because of this and the pity of it is that, having left the word out, neither partner is inclined to 'give way' in anything lest they be thought to be 'weak' or easy to dominate.

Obedience never ever meant domination over one by another.

It is the choice, of both partners, to share in the plans they have devised as they saw their lives moving together.

Our Lord has disclosed His Father's Plan to us.

He has 'charted the Way' for us.

We have of our 'own free will' decided to share it with Him.

The only sensible pathway for us to take is to follow that plan according to His guidance.

What other way could be followed with any plan we agreed to in mutual harmony?

We are called to be His Bride and, just as an earthly bridegroom shows his love for his bride by 'cherishing' her, so has the Lord promised to 'cherish' us.

Our response, as we would expect in an earthly bride, is a loving partnership in the life we have agreed to share with the Bridegroom.

In Ephesians Paul wrote so wonderfully of this relationship that I include it here as a true picture of both the heavenly life and the earthly one.

I have shortened it a little but it would be profitable to read it all at your leisure.

'Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Be filled with the spirit. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.'

'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.'

'Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.'

'Husbands! love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.'

'That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.'

'So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.'

'He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church.'

'For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.'

'For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh.'

'This is a very great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.' Ephesians 5:14-33.

Of course the word 'submit' just as 'obey' is another word which causes some people to rebel at the thought that they might have to surrender to someone else.

In no way does the word here mean to submit because of force or circumstances. It means, as verse 21 shows, to surrender to one another as a 'mutual act' of love, and entered into by each by choice.

The one who loves you is worthy of your love in return and if any of us consider surrender to that love, or submission to that love, or obedience to that love is too much to give, then it is very obvious we have never been worthy of the love that was given.

Oh! That we shall be worthy of His love!

Let us drop our worthless opinions and let God really speak to us.

'And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life!' I John 5:12.

We must be 'born from above.'

We must ask, and allow the Holy Spirit to guide us.

'It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.' John 6:63.

'Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.' Acts 1:8.

Power over sin.

Power over the world.

Power over self.

Power for service.

Power to declare God's love.

Yes! God is waiting and anxious to give this power to all who are willing to love and obey Him.

He wants you.

'Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you' James 4:7-9.

It is this 'seeking after' God. This real hunger for truth that we lack today, and unless our love for the truth is real our way shall be turned into dust, for we have been following but a dream.

'For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.' 2 Timothy 4:3-4.

We have been warned by God and He has warned us time and time again!

Satan is not blind to the advantage he has over us.

He will blind our understanding and harden our heart unless we are determined.

He knows the power of the Spirit and he knows that if we do not have this power within us is able to blind us to the Word itself.

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

Consider the facts!

Satan has had 6000 years in deceiving mankind.

What match are we?

The wisest of us are but children in his clutches.

Satan doesn't even care which course we take if we don't obey God's plan.

We may worship God as much as we like in our own way.

He will probably even help us to find Scripture to justify the way we are taking, or the means to excuse our attitude.

He did this in the Garden of Eden and he tried to do it again when He tempted Christ in the wilderness.

'Be not deceived! God is not mocked! For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' Galatians 6:7.

Solomon wrote, 'There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.' Proverbs 14:12.

Job declared, 'But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.' Job 23:10.

There is no other Way!