

The Gospel

by Dr. Manford George Gutzke

THE *Gospel* of the Lord Jesus Christ means the *good message*, the *glad tidings*, or the *good news*. The *glad tidings* is taken from the word *evangel* and the word *evangel* is taken directly from the Greek.

When I was just a boy, I used to hear that the church was the place where the Gospel was preached. I did not know what the word *Gospel* was supposed to mean. When I found out that it meant good news, I couldn't understand why they said that, because, as far as I could remember, what I heard at church was what not to do. Why should that be good news?

The preacher seemed always to be criticizing or scolding people. When he told the people they were not doing right, he had preached a good sermon. We knew we were doing wrong, and he kept telling us that we were going to be punished. This made us afraid, but we would go out and do wrong anyway, hoping that maybe he had exaggerated the whole thing. We didn't really pay much attention to what the preacher said. If he was not scolding, he was lamenting about something that was not as it ought to be; or he was pushing us to do something different from what we were then doing. Most of us had the feeling that when we went to church we were going to take a whipping. In church we found out we were supposed to do right; and if we did wrong, we could look forward to going to hell. Nobody I knew except the people in church talked about hell, and the church people did not talk about it much; yet it seemed they should and were supposed to. At least that was the impression I got.

How would anyone get an idea of the Gospel from that? Of course, man should not do any wrong, but we did wrong. Who then could go to heaven? The good people went to heaven, but who were the good people? Good people were the people who didn't do anything wrong, but such people did not exist. Who, then, would they be? Babies? They have never done anything wrong. Yes, I got the idea that church people thought all babies went to heaven, and also old folks so decrepit that they could not walk down to the corner. Such folks would go to heaven, but who else? Maybe a few sweet ladies and an occasional Francis of Assisi type of fellow whom we had never seen but whom we had read about. Somebody like that might go to heaven. Angels were in heaven, but the farmers I grew up with were not going to heaven. Not any of them. I knew that perfectly well.

Let me share one more childhood impression of the church with you. Regular churchgoers were a glum, stern crowd. The men were strict, and the women, I thought, were a bitter, nasty, nosy, gossipy lot. When we boys went to church, we were threatened and warned. When we did wrong, it seemed as if somebody were gloating over us, and our sure punishment. Now, we were really going to get it! With such thoughts in mind, what would the *Gospel* be? Good news? What would that mean? For whom would be the good news?

I used to think, it would be a laugh if the sinners were the ones who were going to have the good news. I had always heard that the good news was for the good people. I was in high school before I found out that the Gospel *was* for sinners. Did the Gospel mean that the sinners should be good? That would be

like telling frogs to fly. To tell sinners to be good is just to fill them with despair. Then what would the *Gospel* be?

Sinners must be told that they can be saved. There is still one step to go, however, because when sinners are told they can be saved, they think they can be saved only if they become angels. They must grasp the idea that they can be saved while they are sinners as they are. The Gospel is for the blind, the maimed, the crippled, the diseased, the paralyzed, and those who cannot talk. When can such people have this blessing? *Now!* Good news to the sinner is that he can be saved *now*, and he can come as he is. He does not have to step over any threshold, climb any stairs or mountains, run any fast mile, or swim any river. He can come *now* to the Lord, and the Lord will save him. I know, by the grace of God, that that is the way the Bible states it. The Bible tells that sinners gathered around the Lord Jesus Christ so much that the church people criticized Him because He was associating with sinners. They described Him as "a friend of publicans and sinners." Why would sinners gather around Jesus? Would they be drawn to someone who was going to condemn them? No. They would gather around someone who could save them and would receive them.

REPENTANCE

There are a number of words to understand in order to get the idea of the Gospel. The first word is *repent*. When thinking of the word *repent* or *repentance*, there are at least two general ideas that are not repentance. *Repentance* does not mean to be sorry for some wrong I have done. It may be quite proper that I should be sorry, but this is not *repentance*. Being sorry for sin does not help. It has no value. It is like crying over spilt milk. Certainly one should cry if he spilt the milk. When I was a boy if I ever spilt the milk, I had better start crying right then and continue until my mother got through with me, because it would be a crying situation. But all my crying would never get the milk back up. There is something about *repentance* far more significant than feeling bad over wrong acts.

Some may think repentance is promising to do good. I do not want to seem to be too harsh, but how much good is it going to do for anyone to promise to do good? I don't know about others, but I can tell about myself. It makes me think of New Year's resolutions. They just don't work out. Why not? Well, consider who it is who says he is going to do good. It is the person who has been doing bad. Why did he do bad? He did bad because he was who he was. He was just a bad guy, and he wanted to do what he did. Men do as they do, because they are as they are. Unless something happens to me, I will always be just as I have been. There is very little more a man can do than he is doing now unless God changes him.

Repentance is primarily a judgment about myself. The expression so often used, which has an awkward translation into English, is, "repenting of our sins." Actually this is not a sound idea. The reason it is so awkward to say is that man does not "repent his sins" nor does he "repent of his sins"; he repents himself. Repentance is a judgment upon myself whereby I admit that I am not good. I realize that I just do not have it in me to do right things as I myself think I should.

Repentance is a very important matter. Because it is not until I am willing to acknowledge before God that I am nothing in myself that I will believe the Gospel. It is when I am willing to empty myself that I am open to receive the Lord Jesus Christ. As long as I have my own ideas, I do not want Christ's; but when I am willing to think that I am not what I should be and I am not going to be what I ought to be, then I am ready to turn to the Lord.

At one time the Lord Jesus told righteous people that the publicans and harlots would get into the kingdom of God before they did! Why was He so harsh with them? Because the righteous people thought they had something in themselves and so would not turn to God for help. Those who understand the Gospel know they have nothing in themselves to merit salvation, and so they are ready to turn to God in repentance. They judge themselves to be incompetent and unfit, and they look to God for help. It is wonderful to know they can have help from Him to save their souls.

BELIEVING

The preaching of both John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth was based upon the text "Repent ye, and believe the Gospel." Man must hear something if he is to believe it. Man cannot believe something he has not heard, but that does not mean he will know and understand everything fully when he has heard and says, "I believe." Man can believe what he hears but does not yet know from experience. If he had actually had the experience then he would know, and he would not have to say he believed. There is always an element of looking forward to something which has not been revealed, which has not yet happened, which has not been seen, in believing. Man can look ahead in the promises of God, to what God said He would do for man and he can believe that. He can also look at what the Lord Jesus Christ has done and believe that it is valid for men today. This is taking something to be true which has not yet been demonstrated.

Believing, however, does not make anything real and true. It is one of the sad facts of experience that a person can believe error. To believe a wrong thing is disastrous, just as swallowing poison by mistake is disastrous. A person may believe a glass is filled with milk, but believing the liquid to be milk does not make it milk. The person can give it to a baby, and if by chance it should be a poisonous liquid, the baby would receive it, swallow it, and die. True, it would be a mistake, but the result would be disastrous.

Believing is like swallowing. In believing anyone or anything, a person puts his trust in that person; he commits himself to that thing. If the person is reliable, he is fortunate. If the thing is good, he is again fortunate. In believing, there is always the commitment of oneself to something and reaping the results, whatever they may be.

In the English language, the physical expression *swallowing* and the word *believe* have been brought together. Someone may tell a story, and the listener may wonder if it could be true. Someone else standing by may ask the listener, "Do you swallow that?" meaning "Would you believe it? Would you take as true what this man says?" When one swallows anything, he has committed himself to the consequences of taking the substance into his system. A person can look at the liquid in the spoon as long as he wants to, and as long as he does not take it into his mouth it may be still a matter of opinion as to what it is; but when he takes it into his mouth and swallows it down his throat, he has committed himself to the consequences, whatever they may be. If the consequences are good, the man is fortunate; if they are bad, he is unfortunate. The fact that he thought it was this or that will not change it. Believing that a thing is good does not make it good. It simply inclines one to take it because he thinks it is good.

Believing is not a matter of knowing for sure. Anyone who has been in the business world any length of time will know that believing in the wrong man can hurt you. Because a man makes a good proposition and another man considering partnership with him believes him and invests his money does not mean that the man is honest and sincere. I may believe another man is honest and sincere, but my faith will not make him possess these attributes. If he is a good man, I have lined up with a good man. If he is a bad man, I have lined up with a bad man. Believing always has an element of risk about it.

Many people are inclined to hold back from believing because they think they should come to the place where they finally really know before they act. However, believing is getting to the place where one has sufficient evidence upon which to risk faith, and then committing oneself to this. Believing always has in it the spirit of *adventure*. The Bible speaks of Noah and Abraham as possessing this spirit. Noah acted in faith when he built the ark before it began to rain; he believed God even though there was no immediate evidence for him. Abraham left his home land and ventured into an unknown country simply because God called him to go. To go, when one does not know where he is going, simply because he has been called to go, that is faith.

There is also an element of *volition* in believing. One says, "I will take this. I choose this." The word *believing* is often used in the phrase *believing on*. Thus I may speak of "believing on God" or "believing on the Lord Jesus Christ." *Believing on* the Lord Jesus Christ is like *believing on* a bridge. Suppose I come to a river and find the water so deep the only way to cross is to go over a bridge. Let us

say that spanning the river is a bridge which does not look very safe to me. I am not an engineer, and even if I were I would not know for sure about the present condition of the bridge. Apparently the whole matter of getting over the river will depend on whether or not I will *believe on* the bridge. The only way for me to get across the river would be to trust the entire weight of my car and myself on the bridge. This is what *believing on* the bridge would amount to.

Another illustration might be to think of *believing in* a doctor. Suppose I am sick and I know there are many doctors in the community. Someone draws my attention to a specific one, Dr. Greene, and I decide to make Dr. Greene my doctor. A friend may ask, "Why have you chosen this particular doctor?" I would answer, "I believe in him." "What do you mean when you say you believe in him?" I would answer, "I think he is competent, and he is a very good doctor." Saying that I believe in Dr. Greene is not really going to make any difference in my physical condition. I am only saying that if and when I do go to a doctor I will go to Dr. Greene, but that does not yet mean I am going. The matter of actually letting Dr. Greene be my doctor and *believing in* him is going to require that I go down to Dr. Greene's office and let him treat me. I must commit myself to Dr. Greene. Suppose Dr. Greene is a surgeon and in his examination he finds that it looks as though I have cancer. He tells me that I am to come to the hospital and have an operation. I do not really, in the practical sense, *believe in* the surgeon until I go to the hospital and allow the surgeon to perform his work on me. When I submit myself in this fashion, I am *believing in* the doctor.

Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ has in it that same sort of participation with Him. We need to see this, because very often believing is said to be just a matter of opinion. Actually whether I choose to believe in this or in that is very important. The Gospel is effective and significant only when it is taken in, when it is swallowed. Believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is putting my whole trust in Him, yielding myself to Him, and letting His will be done in my life by His grace and power. Then I can expect Christ's blessing in my life.

It has already been said that one can believe error to one's hurt. When it comes to the Gospel, we do not have to worry. God is reliable. Abraham set the whole pattern for mankind when he acted on the promise of God. The Apostle Paul said, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1:12).

Let me point out one more fact. Believing does not guarantee that my wishes will come to pass. Believing does commit me to the consequences of trusting in that particular thing or that particular person. When speaking about believing the Gospel, it is still true that if I want to cross the river (this life) and reach the other side (heaven) I must believe on the bridge (the Lord Jesus Christ). "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

BORN AGAIN

Being *born again* is what happens to a person who becomes a Christian. It is more than a new birth, more than a second birth, and more than another birth at another time. It is all that, but it is also different. Man is born the first time of human parents and with a human nature. When we say he is born again, we do not mean he is born the second time as a human being and that he has another start for a new life. We mean he was born the first time a human being; but when he is born the second time, he is born a child of God. He is "begotten by the Word of God" and has a new life in him which comes from God.

We can see human nature in a baby. Babies will want everything they can see; they will take anything they can reach; they will hang onto anything they can take; they will try to eat anything they have picked up. What they have, they draw closer and closer to themselves. They do it naturally, and human nature does not change in all the years that follow in their human lives.

A human being reaches out for what he can get and takes it to himself. That is human nature. It is

a normal human thing for a man to say when he looks at any prospect, "What do *I* get out of it? What will *I* have to do? How is it going to affect *me*? Will *I* have an advantage if I do it this way?" This is thoroughly human. The ego can be trained, and it is always a good thing to do that. A man can make himself socially good, polite, and courteous. He can be cultured rather than crude. He can be civilized rather than savage. However, he is still a human being and has only human nature.

The Lord Jesus called human nature *flesh*. There are all kinds of *flesh*, both good and bad. There are all kinds of human beings, but none of them will be able to enter into the kingdom of God as human beings. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 15:50). The Creator, the Maker of all the earth, fixed it so that man would be born once with a human nature which he gets from his parents, in which he becomes conscious of himself and in which he becomes conscious of God. Man has his conscience, which tells him whether he is doing right or wrong, and he feels responsible for his conduct. He is given an opportunity to commit himself to God, accept God's promises, yield himself to God, and receive what God is willing to offer him. He can be saved from his human nature. He can be born again as a child of God. But until that happens he has only human nature, and so is still "in the flesh."

A man is born again as a child of God when hearing the promises of God he receives them and commits himself to them. When the Word of God is spoken to him, he "swallows" it. He takes the Word to himself, saying "This is going to be mine. I am going to commit myself to God according to these promises, whatever the consequences." God does a new work in any man who responds in this way to His Word. All a man needs to do is to open his heart and accept the promise of God. The Bible refers to this new work of God as being *born again*. It is a new creation.

In the new birth, life is not begun over again in an innocent state. Life is now begun in the presence of God by His grace and motivated, inwardly strengthened, helped, lifted, and guided by the living Lord Himself. It is a different kind of life, because now the life of the Lord is in man just in the same way that the life of his parents, his human nature, is in him. Human nature, it has been said, is selfish in its interests. The divine nature which man shares in Christ Jesus after he is *born again* desires to do the will of God. From within, this born-again man wants to be well-pleasing in the sight of God. If he knew what to do to please God and how to do it, he *would* do it for God's sake; and God looking on the heart knows this is true and blesses that person, guides and strengthens him. The second birth is a matter of entering into a new life, a new relationship, with everything that is in Christ Jesus and in God Himself.

This event which Jesus has called being *born again*, the concept of the new birth, is referred to specifically in the Gospel of John. It is also in other Gospels. Matthew states, "No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse" (Matt. 9:16). In those days they did not have Sanforized cloth, and if a piece of new unshrunk cloth was put in a hole in old cloth, the new cloth would shrink when it got wet, and this would tear the hole bigger than it had been before. This reminds me of my boyhood days on our farm in Canada. When my parents would buy me a new suit as a boy, they would always buy one that was several sizes too large because during the first rainstorm the clothes shrunk down to your size. It was always a tragedy to buy something just about the right size; because when it got wet, it would shrink so small you couldn't wear it any more. This helps me to understand the parable. Actually the parable is simply saying that the work of God is not a patchwork proposition. God is not going to patch up at a few points. He is going to give the man a new coat. This is a way of saying the believer will be given a new nature.

Matthew uses a further illustration to show the need of the new birth. The Lord went on to say, "Neither do men put new wine into old bottles (that is, old wineskins); else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved" (Matt. 9:17). The new wine would ferment, the gas would expand and stretch the old wineskins and they would burst. New wine would be put in new wineskins. God does not put His grace in man's old human nature. God works so that man is born again, and then He gives him the grace by which to live.

If the Gospels had been written in our day and time, the illustration used might have been that the Lord Jesus would not repair your engine, but He will put in a new engine. He will not repair the unit in your refrigerator. He will put in a new unit. Your refrigerator unit is one of those things in your home that is not to be repaired. It must be sent back to the factory while the servicemen put a new one in for you. This could illustrate what happens in being *born again*. A new, different, better nature is given to the believer. When a man becomes a Christian, God puts inside him something altogether new. The new birth means that God puts His own nature in a believer. This new nature gives the Christian the disposition to want to be well-pleasing in obedience to God.

The Christian person is still a human being, and so he still has a human nature. But he is also a child of God, and so he now has a divine nature also. That sets up the problem for me as a Christian of how to get along when my human nature is interested in what I myself would like and the divine nature in me is interested in doing what the Lord Jesus Christ wants me to do. The issue for me then is whether to go along with myself or whether to go along with Christ. My personal struggle does not end with my new birth; nevertheless, the new nature now in me is the eternal life of God given to me when I put my trust in Him. It is encouraging to remember that the Bible says, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world."

RECEIVING CHRIST

Receiving Christ is letting Him into my consciousness to influence and affect me. Believing in Him is a matter of accepting what He has done. Receiving Him is a matter of accepting Him and trusting Him to come into my soul. The Lord Jesus said, "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" (Rev. 3:20). From these words it should be understood that God actually comes to my heart when I am a believer.

It is often said that when I became a Christian, I went seeking after God. But as a human being I do not start out by searching for God; it is God who searches for me.

I can hear from someone else what Christ has done for sinners, and I can receive it as true in the sense in which I accept information. I can even rejoice to think of what God has done, without definitely taking it for myself. There comes a time, however, when God Himself comes to my heart. When Christ Jesus knocks at the door of my heart and offers to come in and sup with me, this is not my doing. This is something I let God do; when I receive Jesus Christ, I open my heart and let Him in to do His will.

We should notice that God does not force His way in. It is part of the humility of God that He will stand at the door and knock. It is part of the great seriousness of life that I can leave the door shut.

At the same time we should notice that the phrase "the Lord opened their hearts" is used in Scripture to describe *receiving Christ*. Lydia is said to be one "whose heart the Lord opened" (Acts 16:14). The Holy Spirit can show the things of Christ to a person in such a way that that person will open his heart. This is an action, an exercise of the will, of the believer who receives Jesus Christ. "But to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). *Receiving Christ* is not something a Christian does which can be spelled out in fifteen, twenty, or a hundred different activities; but it is yielding himself to something God does in him. For me to receive Christ is to let God have His way in my life, according to His promises in Christ Jesus.

Again we can use the illustration of dealing with a doctor. Even when I have chosen my doctor, the matter of letting that doctor treat me is something more. This is letting my doctor come in and act *as* my doctor. When I receive Christ into my heart, I let God work in me. I do not have to know what God is doing or understand all His ways. The Lord Jesus said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17). The willing soul is the one whom God will receive, into whose heart He will come, and whom He will bless.

The word *willing* is a present participle. It is used more often as if it were an adjective. Someone is

spoken of as a *willing* person, meaning that he is ready and inclined to act in a certain way. But now look again at the word *willing*. Notice it is I who am willing. If I *will* anything, I am *willing* about it. The willing heart is the heart that wills to do God's will. This means I intend to do what He wants me to do. When the Lord Jesus comes and stands at the door and knocks, the person who *will* open the door to Him is the person who *wills* to have the Lord Jesus Christ come in. I need to open my heart to Him and be willing to have Him come in.

A great artist painted a picture to represent the text, "Behold I stand at the door and knock." He showed a door which was to represent the door of the heart. When the picture was nearly ready for exhibition, the artist called in one of his closest friends to look over the picture. The friend came to see the picture, and after a brief glance said that he supposed some of the most obvious things might skip one's attention. He had noticed that the artist had put no latch on the door. The artist explained that this was not an oversight. There was no latch on the outside, because the door to a man's heart opens only from the inside. This is a profound idea. There is no way of opening the heart of man from the outside. God knocks at the door, but the man himself must be the one to open it.

Perhaps we should also remember that I do not have to clean up inside before I open the door. If I wait until I get things clean, I will never open it. Christ is the only One who can clean you up. When the Lord Jesus comes in, the grace of God, the kindness of God, the love of God, the power of God become active in that human soul. God lifts, carries, and keeps those who let Him have His way.

Receiving Christ is not something that man needs to learn to do or something he must strive to do. Man needs only to open his heart, let Him come in, and receive Him; and this he can do in the simplest way, as a little child. God will work in him "to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). This is the good news of the Gospel. Christ will come in.

When a guest comes to the home, the door is opened and he is asked to come in. The host does everything he can to make the guest welcome. He will turn over, as it were, the whole house to that person. It is like that when you receive Christ into your heart.

ABIDING IN CHRIST

Only a Christian could know what the phrase *abiding in Christ* means. The word *abiding* is not a word that is ordinarily used today. It means *living in* or *dwelling in*. A house is referred to as an abode. It is the place where a certain family lives. *Abiding in Christ*, therefore, is a way to say *living in Him*.

When the word *Christ* is used in this way, reference is being made to a pattern of relationship with God. *Abiding in Christ* does not mean that the body of Jesus of Nazareth is here and that the Christian claims he is in it. Also, it does not mean that Christ is some organization on earth that one can join and thus be *in Christ*. *Abiding in Christ* is rather living in a certain relationship with God which Christ Jesus has provided. It is a pattern of relationship which involves certain principles.

Abiding in Christ includes the belief that God is, and that God is Creator, Keeper, Judge, Saviour, and Father. When man has the existence of God in mind, immediately man is responsible to obey Him. God is the Creator; man belongs to Him. Sin is any act on the part of the human being or any condition in the human being, that is a deviation from the will of God.

The word *Christ* used in the phrase *abiding in Christ* means everything that is meant by the word *God*. It also brings to mind that man is a sinner; he has broken the law of God, and is doomed to distress and destruction. Man in himself is lost. However, man need not remain lost, for the word *Christ* further brings to mind that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son (Christ), that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The person who can claim John 3:16 is one who is abiding in Christ. He is trusting in the act of God, who sent His Son into the world to redeem those who have put their trust in Him. Christ comes bringing forgiveness and cleansing – salvation.

Anyone can abide in Christ but not everyone does. *Abiding in Christ* is a relationship man enters into. The Lord Jesus said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). This means that no one enters this relationship unless he is born again. When a person enters this relationship with God, he joins the company of believers who trust in God by faith. It is possible for a person to be sure that he belongs to God, because he belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ.

To define *abiding* and *belonging* we could have the idea of *resting* in mind. A child rests in his mother's arms. A boy rests in his father's home. In each instance, the idea of belonging is conveyed. The boy belongs to his father's home. He lives in the home; he gets all the benefits of living in the home; he has the fellowship of the people in the home; and he has the protection that comes with living in the home. Everything that goes with having a home is included in the word *abiding*.

When a person is *abiding in Christ*, it means that so far as his soul is concerned he is *resting* in the work of Christ. The idea of *abiding* means *staying* there. It is not just a casual looking-into but "living in Christ." It is not just stepping in on a Sunday morning and staying for a half hour or an hour and then stepping out for the rest of the time. The person who is abiding in Christ is a person who believes in God all the time, believes in the living Lord Jesus Christ all the time, believes in the presence of God with him all the time, and believes in the forgiveness of and cleansing from sins all the time.

If the person who is abiding in Christ is asked about what is going to happen to him tomorrow, he will say he will be taken care of tomorrow. How does he know? Because God is his Father. How does he know God is his Father? The person who is abiding in Christ has an assurance that God is his Father because he is "in Christ Jesus," and God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing that God is one's Father brings a certain inward quiet confidence, because so far as living is concerned nothing can take the Christian away from God.

This confidence is not limited only to the areas of life involving protection and the forgiveness of sins, but it is true also when it comes to making a choice in life. When confronted with decisions as to what he shall do, where he shall go, and whom he shall go with, the person who is abiding in Christ is conscious of the Lord during this time. There comes a time when a person who is abiding in Christ realizes that there is *never* a time when he can talk to any other person as though he and that person were alone. For a Christian there would always be three – the Christian himself, the person he is talking with, and the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is present, because the Christian trusts in Him.

Someone may suggest the danger that the world may be destroyed and that man might be destroyed. Yes, there is that danger; but the Christian will not be greatly upset. Why not? Because while his body is living in this world, in soul and spirit he is living in the Lord Jesus Christ. The body may be destroyed, but the soul and spirit cannot be destroyed. The body may waste away and be broken, but the soul cannot waste away and be broken.

The person who is abiding in Christ has an outlook and an attitude about life as follows: So far as he is concerned the world is real, and he will deal with it; but he does not belong to it and if it were to be taken away from him, he would be in the presence of God – absent from the body, present with the Lord. There is no decision to make between here and there, because having known Christ and walked with Him, the Christian is in His presence. It is not when the Christian dies that the Lord finds out whether or not he belongs to Him. That has already been settled. Death, for the person who is abiding in Christ, does not have the uncertainty of some terrible examination which he may fail to pass. The person who is abiding in Christ is trusting in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ and should he "die before he awakes," he is satisfied that the Lord Jesus will take his soul to be with the Father.

Abiding in Christ has a guarding effect with reference to one's heart and mind as far as the things around him are concerned. The things of this world do not have the same appeal; they appeal only to the part of the Christian that has to do with this world and that is second in importance. The part that has to do with the living Lord Jesus Christ, in whom he is abiding, is far more important. When walking along hand

in hand with the Lord Jesus Christ, it does not matter whether he is wearing this or that. It can get to the point where it is not even important whether or not his football team wins on Saturday. He would be glad to have it win, but if it happened to lose, nothing very much would be lost. The Christian belongs to the Lord and the things having primary importance in his life are his dealings with Him.

The people in the world may think that everything just written presents a very unreal situation, but the Christian knows better. It is not the least bit unreal. It is just as practical as it has been set forth. The matter of *abiding in Him* has in it the idea that the Christian is always in a relationship with God which Christ Jesus provided for him.

SERVING THE LORD

Serving the Lord describes the Christian life. This should be used only about Christians; however, *servicing the Lord* is not done by every Christian. It is done by Christians who actively, consciously worship and yield to the living Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Serving the Lord is not a matter of doing what I can to work out a goal or purpose which I think God wants. For example, if I thought all the children of the community should belong to a certain organization, so that I would go out and try to get them all to join, thinking that as they joined I would be *servicing the Lord*, I might be *servicing the Lord* as I was working, but it would not be because I was working in that organization. *Servicing the Lord* is not an outward community campaign. It does not follow that if I work to see that new apartment houses are built where a slum area now exists I am *servicing the Lord*, while anyone who is not involved in that activity is not. *Servicing the Lord* is not something that can be identified with external activities.

Some people think that serving the Lord means I must go to Africa as a missionary, or I have to preach, or I have to teach Sunday school. Anyone of those things might happen, but that is not the same as serving the Lord, because a person whose whole life is taken up with ordinary routine things can serve the Lord. A woman who is working at being a wife and mother and taking care of a home can serve the Lord. This does not mean that every woman who is married and helping her husband is serving the Lord. It does not mean that every woman who has children is serving the Lord. It does not mean that every person who cleans up her house is serving the Lord. It does not mean that everyone who has a place of business and operates that business honestly is serving the Lord. The Bible tells us what it means to serve the Lord: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col. 3: 17). To *serve in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ* is to be conscious of Him, trusting in Him, and responding to Him while I am going about doing whatever I am doing.

Let us consider the woman who does the daily work in the home. How can she in this serve the Lord? Her daily task is what God in His providence has given to her hand to do. She can accept her tasks in the home as something that God has set out for her. She can actually sweep the floor, wash the dishes, iron the children's clothes, greet the neighbors, take care of the children, discipline the growing youngsters, guide the affairs in the house, and seek to help her husband in his business, as if she were doing it for the Lord Himself. She can have in mind that this is what the Lord wants her to do. She can keep the Lord first in mind and not the children, the neighbors, the husband, or the house.

A man who goes to a place of business where he has a job to perform can accept that work as something which God in His providence has enabled him to have. He can, in this situation, work as though he were working for the Lord Himself. He can be on the job at eight o'clock, because that is the time the Lord wants him to be there. He can work from eight until twelve, because he is doing work that the Lord is going to see. He will go out for lunch and he will come back at one o'clock because that is when the Lord wants him to be there. Throughout the entire day, until the whistle blows at five o'clock, he will continue to work as serving the Lord. That man probably won't hurry away too soon, because the Lord may want him to be there past five o'clock.

Also, such a man will accept the people who are in the office as individuals the Lord has allowed to be there. He may not like all of them. He may not always think every one is doing the right thing, but he will accept all these things as from the Lord. If there is prosperity, he will thank the Lord. If some misfortune or calamity occurs, he will trust the Lord. He is doing *everything* as "unto the Lord." He is not sentimental about it, but deep down in his heart he is conscious that this is the Lord's will.

Everything is all-inclusive; therefore, it suggests that when the man drives his car on the streets, he will drive it as if the Lord were with him. He will deal fairly with everyone, because he is acting in the presence of the Lord. He is an example of a man who is serving the Lord throughout the day.

Everyone finds most of his life already settled for him. There are things he has to do to make a living, and certain things he has to do in the neighborhood if he is going to live there. A Christian will do these activities having in mind that he will be doing them as "unto the Lord." Such a person will take the seven days of the week as from the Lord and will "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8). He accepts the whole week as from the Lord, and he may have in mind that a way to honor God is in proper observance of the Lord's day.

When this person earns money, no one has to tell him to give part of the money to his church. He is inwardly prompted to do that, because the Lord is in his heart and he is living in His presence. When he is serving the Lord with his money, he does not give all of it away. He has to make a living for himself and take care of his family. He knows that, of all the things the Lord gives him, a certain amount is to be given to the Lord. He will understand that God will give him enough so that he can put a tenth of what he receives into the Lord's work, and nine-tenths of what he gets will be adequate for everything he needs. If he should need more money, he will talk to the Lord about it. If he meets a different situation, he will talk to the Lord about it, also. This person is serving the Lord.

Someone may ask this person to teach a Sunday school class; and, if asked, he will ask himself one thing, "Is this what the Lord wants me to do?" If the Lord wants him to teach, he will, whether he feels he can teach or not. He will *try* to do this thing that comes before him. That is serving the Lord.

It has already been suggested that this can come down to personal affairs – for example, in dealing with people. Some persons may be contentious. They want to argue and fuss about trifles. The Christian person in his heart will cry out, "Lord, do you want me to argue and fuss about this thing?" The Lord would say, "No, I want you to give in to it." The Christian serves the Lord and gives in to the man. The man thinks he got away with something. He really did not. The Christian acted the way the Lord wanted him to.

This does not mean that the Lord gives to each man a pattern, or a formula, or puts in his hand a handbook with minute instructions as to what to do so that when the situation comes up he can turn to a certain page and find out exactly what he is supposed to do. One of the problems people have when they come to the Bible is that the Bible does not tell them specifically what they ought to do on the particular street on which they live. No house numbers are in the Bible. One's neighbors are not listed by name in the Bible. The Bible does not state exactly what should be done with each individual person and in each particular situation. It does give certain principles that can be followed, but that is not even adequate because those principles need interpretation. Therefore, God gives to the Christian His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, making the things of Christ real inside the heart of a Christian, makes the Christian conscious of the living Lord Jesus Christ. There is as it were a voice behind him that says, "This is the way, walk ye in it" (Isa. 30:21).

The Christian person, informed as he is, intelligent as he may be, acquainted with things as they are, understanding things in every way, and acting, living, and doing in the world as he should, has in his heart at all times a consciousness of the living Lord Jesus Christ. He responds in all situations as he feels the Lord would want him to do.

These principles concerning work are equally applicable to amusement or entertainment. It may be

an old saying, but it has been proved that "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." A certain amount of relaxation is necessary and important. A Christian will find when he takes relaxation that he does not feel he is sinning. He does not think he is getting away with anything; for even in his hours of relaxation, he is conscious of the presence of God. Whatever the particular game is that he gives himself over to for relaxation, he is going to play it as if the Lord Jesus were there with him. Actually the Lord is there. If complications develop, the Christian will have within himself the consciousness of the Lord and will be obedient to what the Spirit prompts him to think the living Lord Jesus wants him to do. Such a person is serving the Lord.

The adornment which a Christian woman puts on when she dresses up, which will be perfectly proper for her to wear, will depend upon what she thinks will be pleasing in the eyes of the Lord, who is right there with her and sees her doing these things. Every conceivable thing I do will be affected by His presence in me. "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Col. 3:17). This is what it means to be *servng the Lord*.

THE BLESSED HOPE

Christians have an idea of what is going to happen, which is called *the blessed hope*. This is a forward look along the lines of the promises of God in the Bible. God knows what He is aiming to do and has revealed some of it to His people.

Life in this world develops in three phases – past, present, and future. My life comes from yesterday, through today, and into tomorrow. We all have feelings about yesterday. Sometimes we have feelings of regret. We all are aware of today; and most of us have some bewilderment and confusion about the future, as we look for tomorrow.

As the Christian looks forward there is in him an element of confident expectation. The Christian believes that it is going to be better tomorrow than it is today. One reason for his thinking this is because he knows God is working. The world warns and threatens that things will be worse tomorrow than they were today. It is a natural thing to feel that yesterday was better, today is bad enough, but tomorrow is going to be awful. Many people live in dread of what another day will bring forth.

This is not true for Christians. It is not that Christians think everything in this world is going to turn out all right. They are not being merely optimistic. Christians believe that Almighty God, working in this world, is a benevolent God. He means well by mankind. The Lord Jesus Christ died for all men. He is now in the presence of God. He is almighty and powerful and He will finally triumph. Regardless of how dark the future may be, there is a glory awaiting in the things of the Lord. This is what the Bible says, and this is what the Christian thinks. In the mind and heart of the believer in Christ there is a forward look that is an upward look in joyous expectation.

Between this life and that final glory, there may be the experience of death. A Christian is normal and natural enough to know that death is an enemy. However, a Christian is not afraid of death, because Christ Jesus died and arose again. Christ has taken the sting out of death. One reason death is so heavy in the consciousness of the average non-Christian is because after death comes the judgment. A person who is thinking about dying is thinking about going into the presence of God and being judged. When anyone feels that way, you can know for sure he has not yet really understood the Gospel.

A Christian may look forward into tomorrow and realize he will stand before God, who knows all about him. The fact that the Christian has sinned will not be a surprise to God. God already knows about his sins, and He has already forgiven his sins. That is what Christ Jesus died for. The Christian is not moving forward into judgment. It is natural for the human heart to feel that way, but the Gospel would tell the Christian that will not happen to him. My expectation is not that one day I will stand in the presence of God, and God will decide whether or not I am good enough to belong to Him. That has already been settled. It was known from the beginning that no man in himself is good enough. But Christ Jesus

died for sinners, and He carried away the sin of the whole world and set men free from sin and death. As a Christian I can look forward to coming into the presence of God in all the triumph of Christ's completed work in me.

The wonderful thing in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is that Almighty God wants to bless and help men, and in order to get that done He sent His son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to save men. The Lord Jesus Christ will bring us through into the presence of God. He will do so in triumph and great glory. The Christian has that expectation.

The Lord Jesus is not done with His work; He is not finished. It is true that with reference to sin He is finished. He finished that when He died for sin on Calvary's cross. However, the evangelism of the world was not finished. God wants the Gospel preached to all nations that everyone should hear the message of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is still going on.. The Lord Jesus is now working to save men "to the uttermost" and that is not yet finished. The Apostle Paul could say after he had been an apostle for many years, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:13-14). The process was still going on in him. This does not mean that the Apostle Paul had any doubt about his salvation. It does not mean that he was wondering whether or not he would be saved. He knew he was saved, but he was looking forward to the fullness of the salvation in Jesus Christ as God worked in him to will and to do of His good pleasure.

The operation of God's plan for man and for the world is not finished. The Bible tells us in various ways, but always so that it cannot possibly be mistaken, that the Lord Jesus will come again. The Old Testament predicted that He would come to die. The New Testament promises He will come again to rule. The coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ is part of the Gospel. When the Lord Jesus finished His work on Calvary's cross, He was not through with the task given to Him. When He ascended into heaven in full view of all, He had finished the work of salvation, but not the complete unfolding of God's plan. He is sitting now at the right hand of God interceding for us, but this is not the end. "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11). The Lord Jesus Christ, when He comes again into this world, will complete the plan of God. Then the things that God wants to have done will actually be accomplished as the Lord Jesus Christ manifests the glory of God in full view of the whole creation.

The coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ has been referred to by many people as *the blessed hope*. It is *the blessed hope* with reference to the Lord Jesus Christ's presence. But there is a certain element of *the blessed hope* in every expectation of what God will do. The word of the Lord Jesus says, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I Will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3). That is a blessed thing. It is a wonderful expectation. In the first epistle of John we read, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself" (1 John 3:2-3).

The Christian has the confident expectation that he is going to meet the Lord face to face. I do not know for sure that I will be here alive on the earth when the Lord Jesus comes. Some persons will be. I may have fallen asleep in Jesus, but just as surely as God is in heaven and the Lord Jesus comes, I will be raised to meet Him. This is the scriptural promise, and the Christian can cherish the blessed hope of expectation of meeting the Lord.

Songs have been written about the blessed hope. "When we all get to heaven, What a day of rejoicing that will be!" "When all my labors and trials are o'er, And I am safe on that beautiful shore, Just to be near the dear Lord I adore, Will through the ages be glory for me." There are many such songs which Christians have used to express their expectation that God will one day manifest His glory, take them to

Himself, and vindicate every one who has put his trust and faith in the Lord.

When the Lord Jesus comes again, He will come suddenly. It will be in such a time as man thinks not that He will come. No one, by any manner of investigation or examination or reason, can possibly say when that day will be. The day and the hour is not known to any man, but God knows. In the fullness of time God will again send forth His Son. What is so important to the Christian is that He will come to bless and take him to Himself.

The blessed hope, when it is cherished, fills the heart with a confident expectation that the future is in the hands of God. When the Christian looks forward to the future, to death and life after death, there is in his heart a confident expectation that God will do him good. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, God has prepared the way so that the Christian is going to come into His presence in glory.

RESURRECTION

The Christian believes in "resurrection unto eternal life." The idea of *resurrection* is more than that a person is going to live again. That much is true, but resurrected people will live on a different level. Being raised from the dead is not a matter of having another chance to do the same thing. Rather, it is a privilege of living in a situation better than anything ever experienced before.

Jesus of Nazareth is the supreme example. The Son of God took on human flesh and in that flesh He died. When God raised Him up from the dead, it was confirmed to the whole world that what the Lord Jesus had said was true. As He raised up the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, so He will raise from the dead anyone who believes in Him.

There are instances of resurrection in the New Testament other than that of Christ: for example, the widow's son, the rich man's daughter, and Lazarus. These resurrections, however, were not like the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are not like our resurrection. Each one of these people died again. But when a believer is raised in the Lord Jesus Christ, there will be no second death.

What the resurrection really means is that when a man has lived his life, God will bring this man to life again in a body prepared for him by Almighty God. It sounds incredible, but this is what the Bible teaches; it is the very essence of the Christian Gospel.

When the Lord Jesus Christ was asked to give the people some sign that would show them that He was the Son of God, He told them the only sign would be the resurrection of His body. One fact He expressed over and over again was "Destroy this temple (His body), and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). He was referring to His physical resurrection, but the spiritual truth is even more profound. His resurrection shows the power of God to raise the dead, but the spiritual truth is that a person living as a human being can pass through the experience of death in human nature to be raised from the dead and to live in the nature of God. This is "resurrection unto eternal life" and it takes place as soon as the person turns from the things of this world and yields himself to the Lord.

The Bible speaks of the existence one gets from his parents in this world as "life," but when it speaks of the life that comes into a person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the "life of God," it calls it "eternal life." Eternal life does not mean life in this world going on forever. It means this life coming to an end – dying – and a new life from God that never ends because it is from God. The body will pass through the resurrection sometime in the future and it will be changed. The soul also passes through the resurrection but that happens while I am still living in this world. My soul is raised in newness of life the moment the Holy Spirit of God comes to dwell within me.

And now, consider again the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. When He was killed on the cross at Calvary, His body died. On the day that Jesus was crucified there were two other men, two thieves, crucified with Him. Those three men were crucified the same way, and they died in the same way. The Bible does not tell how the soldiers undertook to check on the death of the two thieves, but in order to make sure that Jesus was dead, they pierced His side with a spear. That pierced body was raised

from the dead.

But when it was raised from the dead it was different. The resurrection body was enough like the human body that they could recognize Him. The nail prints were in His hands. The wound was in His side. It is commonly thought that this was for identification purposes, and that Almighty God left them in Him as marks of His great suffering for mankind. But the resurrection body apparently was made of different stuff.

When the Bible tells of resurrection, it is understood that men's bodies will be raised from the grave and brought into the presence of God. As discussed in Chapter Five, we should understand that the people who are raised from the dead are not going to look the way they looked when they died. If some person suffered in those last days and lost weight until he was weak, frail, and emaciated, he is not going to look like that when he is raised from the dead. If someone was unfortunate enough to lose a limb and lived his days one-armed or one-legged, when he is raised from the dead he is not going to look like that. When he is raised from the dead, he will be as he was originally designed. Not only will the body look different, but it will be made of something different and it will be complete.

The human body is made of the dust of the earth. It is composed of chemicals that are found in the world (carbon, oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen, iron, sulphur, etc.). All these things belong to this world, and all these things will perish with the world. So will the earthly body of any person. The body will be raised from the dead, but the new elements which will then be in the body will be everlasting elements of a spiritual, heavenly nature.

A man can have an architect draw up a design and plan for a house. He can build that house with wood, or he can build it with stone. It will not make any difference as far as the shape of the plan is concerned. The windows, doors, roof, and everything will be the same shape according to the plan. The body's structural principle is like that plan, and that is what is going to be raised from the dead. It will die no more because the stuff that it is made from will not be temporal. In 1 Corinthians, Chapter 15, Paul says that there is a natural body and there is a spiritual body. The heavenly body is also called a glorified body. This body will not experience pain, suffering, and death. The reason may very well be that the stuff of which the body is made is different. That is the kind of body the Lord Jesus Christ had when He ascended into heaven.

The new life that is going to be lived in Christ Jesus is different from this life on earth. Heaven is different from earth. It is a whole lot better. The resurrection is unto eternal life. If I have an understanding of "the resurrection of the body," I will also have in mind the resurrection of the soul in which I am raised in newness of life. If I reckon myself indeed to be dead to sin, crucified with Christ, and raised in newness of life, I will mortify my members here upon earth that I might put on the spiritual ways of living and the things that belong to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Every Christian person has the expectation that he is going to be different. Someone may come to a Christian person and say to him, "Well, I don't see that you are any different from other human beings." That is true now. He is not any stronger, taller, or bigger than other people, but one of the things the Christian can know is that he is not going to be as he is now all the time. When his body begins to wear away, his eyes lose their sight, his muscles are no longer strong, and aches and pains many times bother him, the Christian has an inward, secret, joyful hope: he knows that he is going to leave this body behind.

The Christian may have personal traits and characteristics that are the same as they were before he became a believer. It may seem that he is always going to be that kind of person. That may be true in this world, but one of these days that body is going to be put six feet under and left right there. He is going to live forever in the new body that will be given to him in Christ Jesus. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ promises that the Christian will share the "resurrection unto eternal life" wherein he will live a new, different life in Christ to the glory of God